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ABSTRACT

This manual is intended to help educators and families address students' behavioral problems so that students with emotional and behavioral difficulties can be included in regular education. Chapter 1 is an introduction and uses vignettes to identify supports that students, educators, and families say they need. Chapter 2 offers case studies on how to devise a support plan for students with challenging behavior. A team approach is emphasized. The third chapter focuses on establishing the collaborative team. It provides checklists for educators and families, identifies who should be on the team, and considers how such teams make decisions and solve problems. Chapter 4 considers the importance of getting to know the student and understanding the problem behavior's functions. The fifth chapter offers suggestions for identifying student supports, including ways to facilitate students supporting each other and the effects of various teaching styles. The selection and teaching of replacement behaviors are discussed in the sixth chapter. Chapter 7 looks at the importance of appropriately responding to challenging behaviors, noting the effects of emotion, school discipline policies, and the need to neutralize a tense situation and refocus students. The final chapter focuses on specific ways to include students with challenging behavior in regular class activities, monitor progress, and plan transitions. Attached is a list of 84 recommended resources. (Contains 18 endnotes.) (DB)

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ED 378 758

A Positive Approach to Understanding and Addressing Challenging Behaviors

Supporting Educators and Families to Include Students with Emotional and Behavioral Difficulties in Regular Education

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction 1

Is the Process Only Intended for Students Who Present Intensive Behavior Challenges? 1

What Joseph Has to Say 2

What Supports Do Students Say They Need 6

What Diana Has to Say 8

What Supports Do Educators Say They Need? 13

What Alicia Has to Say 14

What Supports Do Families Say They Need? 17

What Makes Support Plans Work? 18

Chapter 2 Case Studies on How to Devise a Support Plan for Students with Challenging Behavior 21

Case Study #1: Malcolm's Story 21

Team's Approach 21

Lessons Learned 22

Case Study #2: Allison's Story 24

Team's Approach and Lessons Learned 25

Let's Talk About How to Devise a Student Support Plan for Students with Challenging Behavior 25

Chapter 3 Establish a Team 29

Introduction 29

Collaborative Checklist for Educators 29

Collaborative Checklist for Families 30

Collaborative Checklist for All Team Members 30

What Is a Collaborative Team? 30

Who Should Be on the Team? 31

Who Else Should Be on the Student Support Team? 33

How Do Collaborative Support Teams Make Decisions? 35

How Do Collaborative Support Teams Solve Problems? 35

4

How Do We Brainstorm? 35

How Do Collaborative Teams Deal with Controversial Issues? 36

Chapter 4 Getting to Know the Student 39

Identify Student Strengths and Needs 39

How Should the Challenging Behaviors Be Described? 42

How Can What Precedes the Behavior Be Identified? 45

How Can What Follows the Behavior Be Identified? 46

What Needs Do Challenging Behaviors Communicate? 46

How Can the Needs the Challenging Behavior Communicates Be Identified? 48

Chapter 5 Identify Student Supports 57

Are There Any Guidelines for Selecting Support Strategies? 57

How Can We Facilitate Students Supporting Each Other? 63

Are There Specific Approaches for Developing Friendships and Support? 64

Can the Way in Which the Teacher Communicates with Students Provide Support? 66

Are There Teaching Styles Which Support Preventing Challenging Behavior? 69

How Does a Teacher Who Uses a Democratic Teaching Style Respond to Challenging Behavior? 70

Chapter 6 Select and Teach Replacement Behavior 71

What are Replacement Behaviors? 71

What are Some Guidelines for Selecting Replacement Behavior? 71

What are Some Strategies for Teaching Replacement Behavior? 72

Are There Other Skills Which Should Be Addressed? 73

Are Their Specific Approaches for Teaching Prosocial Skills? 76

What are Some Common Strategies Used to Teach Students to Regulate Their Own Behavior? 76

Are There Prosocial Skill Curriculums Which Address Teaching Students to Manage and Evaluate Themselves? 78

Chapter 7 Responding to Challenging Behavior 81
Introduction 81
How Do Emotions and Anxiety Affect Responding to Challenging Behavior? 81
How Do School Discipline Policies Impact on Selecting Effective Responding Strategies? 82
Responding to Challenging Behavior 82
How Can a Situation Be Neutralized or Calmed? 84
How Can Students Be Refocused? 84
How Can Student Efforts to Turn a Situation Around Be Encouraged? 87
How Can You Respond When Students Are Out of Control? 87
Chapter 8 Including Students with Challenging Behavior in Regular Class Activities, Monitoring Progress, and Planning Transitions 91
Including Students in Regular Class Activities 91
How Do We Plan to Meet Students' Needs Within Regular Class Activities? 92
How Can Progress Be Monitored? 93
How Can Team Functioning Be Monitored? 94
How Can Transitions Be Planned? 94
Conclusions 95
For More Information 97
Rational/Philosophy 97
Collaborative Teaming 98
Friendship and Peer Support Strategies 99
Meeting Support Needs 100
Planning for Inclusion 101
Functional Assessment 102
Teaching Prosocial Skills 102
Self-Esteem 103
Grading 103
Endnotes 105

Chapter 1

Introduction

We believe that all kids, regardless of whether or not they present challenging behavior, need to be supported to feel good about themselves, to feel good about school, and to feel that they belong in their families, schools and communities. We have found that simply providing opportunities for all students to be "present" at school is not sufficient for promoting student belonging. For belonging to occur, students and their teachers must be supported. Opportunities must be created for students to participate in meaningful ways and to make friendships. For every student to belong, educators must strive to find a way to help all students to have power and worth as individuals and as a group member.

Despite the volumes published on addressing challenging behaviors, many families and educators are perplexed when faced with behavioral challenges. Our goal is to empower you to address challenging behaviors by introducing you to a process which promotes student belonging through the development of supports which help prevent challenging behavior and build relationships. Through our work with teachers, students and their families we have learned that empowerment only happens when people learn from their own experience. Every day we spend in classrooms we learn something new. The educators we meet are amazing. They care about children as if they were their own. They have taught us and each other not to accept failure but to learn from it. They have shown us how theory and practice move together, how they inform one another. In this book, we present a process for addressing challenging behaviors based upon the experiences of students, their families and teachers and ask that you reflect upon the process from your own experiences.

It would be easy to write a script blaming educators, students, families, lack of money, or unrealistic expectations from our communities and professionals for the discipline challenges faced by our schools. The purpose of this book is to describe a positive process for addressing challenging behavior, not to play the "blame game." We will not offer a quick fix or any magic solutions. What we do provide is an honest discussion about how we feel when faced with a challenging teaching interaction, what we think about, what we try to do and why we do it.

Is the Process Only Intended for Students Who Present Intensive Behavior Challenges?

No. Almost all students get into trouble at one time or another. The process and prevention strategies can be used to support any student and to help prevent the occurrence of very minor to intensive behavior problems.

There are a myriad of labels used by educators and mental health providers to describe students who present intensive behavior challenges. Assessing whether or not a student falls within the clinical range of a particular psychological disorder may serve as a vehicle to qualify for needed resources, but it does not enable educators to meet the person's needs. Our experience is that the process for problem solving situations, developing supports, and building positive relationships is the same for any student, with or without labels, and whether or not they present intensive behavior challenges. However, the specific nature of the supports will vary from student to student based upon their individual needs. The following is a discussion about what teachers, students and their families think, feel and do about challenging behavior. We will describe how educators and families can support students and each other in addressing stressful situations.

A critical element for developing supports for students and for preventing challenging behaviors is to listen to the students themselves. We begin by listening to Joseph. He is 14 and attends a local junior high school. His teachers told us that it was helpful to "put themselves in his shoes" in order to try to understand the world from his perspective. As you read take a guess about...

...why he gets into trouble;

...what is important to him, why he gets out of bed in the morning;

...what supports he needs to get through the day; and

...what he needs to have fun.

What Joseph Has to Say

What are the things that you like about school Joseph?

Things that I like? Well, I have to say that the things I do like are having friends that care about me. Because up here you usually find out pretty quick who your friends are. If a guy is nice to you when his other friends are around then you know that he is your friend. That is the way you can tell.

I like it when everybody is happy and we are all talking and laughing and doing things together like as a team. Because we have a small enough class that everybody can work together.

I also like to go to the learning center. I'm not sure what you call it. It isn't really special ed., it's like an organizing class. If I go in there they help me organize my work and section out my stuff so I can know where everything is and it helps me keep my school life on track. Sometimes if I'm in a bad mood I go there. Nobody tells me to get my act together, they help me get organized.

How would your teachers describe you?

As a smart kid that doesn't do his work. Kind of gets a little loud at times. Likes to walk around. They would probably describe me as hyper. Ask any teacher that. That's what they always tell me. Mr. Jacobs says that he'll give me work and that I just sit and do nothing all day long. But then when I do something I do a pretty good job at it. In the last couple months I've had all my teachers ask what they can do to help me improve my work. I just tell them that they can't make me improve anything, it has to be my decision.

How would other students describe you?

Weird, funny guy but doesn't know when to shut up. Or he is really loud and stands out but everybody knows he's smart. Most of them just think I'm probably slime. They don't like me. Some think I'm kind of a pain and kind of a nice person. All in one package. It's hard to say because usually your friends don't tell you what they really think of you.

Some kids just want more attention and people don't give it to them, so they act differently. Like if class is quiet, dead silence, everybody is working and I come in late and I have a story to tell. They will stop what they are doing and listen to what I have to say. But when everything comes down and we are all in trouble, I get busted for it and everybody yells at me for getting them in trouble.

What don't you like about school?

School is okay but they don't think of anything new to do. It's kind of cool but some days I just don't feel like doing any work. I usually get detention like I got one yesterday. Somebody said that my mother was a babbling —. Really made me mad. When that happened my mood changed. I could be nice one minute but if somebody says something about my mother who has lung cancer I'll pound their head in. When somebody insults her like, "I hope your mother dies," I don't care if there is a teacher around or not I'll probably pound them.

I started falling behind in my math class, then I started failing science class, then I started failing another class. So it's like a chain reaction. Like dominos. You fail one, you figure, "Oh man," you start doing a lot of that work. And then you slack off on other work. You're knocking over all the dominos before you get a chance to set another one on top of it.

How could school be different?

Well, we really don't have much choice. Most of the time if I want to do something and the teachers don't want me to do it, I'll usually throw a fit or do something to get my way.

Also, its just the way that he (paraprofessional) talks to me. He doesn't treat me like he should. He doesn't treat me like everybody else. I understand what he is saying, like don't screw off in class, be attentive, do the work but it's not that easy to change. It takes time to get used to it. Within like 3 or 4 weeks he wanted me to change, that ain't easy to do.

They could maybe help me more with my work. Last year, I had two different teachers. The first one wrote everything down, the second one didn't. Instead of writing down and showing me what she wanted, she would tell me and have me repeat it. I needed to have things written down. I did very bad. I wasn't getting the help I needed. I really liked school but my grades were F's and D's. They need to do more testing to see what the problem is. Instead of saying this kid ain't trying or whatever. Then go from there, make a plan and go with it.

And if the reason kids are getting into trouble is because they need money, and they need help finding a job, then have more after school programs or something for the kids that want a job.

What would make you happier?

Happier? Have more friends who cared about me. No matter what I do or how I act.

Do you get in trouble?

Well, sometimes it happens 'cause I've done something wrong. I don't mean to and always like they don't give me a chance to explain. When I say sorry, they just kick me out of the room.

Like today I got detention. She gave us a week to do an assignment and I just said, "I'll do it tomorrow," and kept forgetting about it. So she gave me another day to do it and I blew it off and she gave me detention. The teachers really give you a lot of chances. Usually when I get in trouble it's for something pretty serious. A couple of weeks ago I got detention for getting into a fight. The last time I got suspended, I was in earth science lab and we were melting candles and I light a piece of paper on fire.

Well, while I'm here in school, I get my education. When I'm not here, like when they suspend me, I don't get my education. I don't like to go to a tutor for two weeks because I don't learn anything there. There's other ways of dealing with things instead of kicking me out of school. A kid doesn't do nothing but get in trouble if he's not in school. When you go to tutoring, you're on your own. You do what you want. Robbing people or you go home and sleep. You don't get your education.

Are you learning things in school to help you get along with others better?

Yes, I'm starting to learn how to ignore people and how to mind my own business. Well, its like part of a reaction. They are teaching me to smile *and then walk away. Creative wise, I went to a big symposium called "Mediation: Solving Conflicts Together." About a hundred of us from different schools sat in one room in a great big circle. And we talked about a whole bunch of things that we don't normally deal with. And the teacher, she's been a mediator for six years and she's been divorced and everything. She's pretty good, she teaches us a lot of things.*

Well, I know what kids are going through. I found out that I was adopted, and I think that's why, maybe, I've been getting into trouble. Like, sometimes I'm real angry about it. And I get my temper out on the teachers.

I understand that your family and teachers get together once a week to meet, what is it like to go to those meetings?

Yes, I go to those meetings. Sometimes the team is too business like. It's like watching TV and seeing a board meeting on TV. It feels like everyone is watching you to see if you are going to screw up. For me it was just being the only kid there. Maybe if we had one team with two individuals that had something going on; so that one wouldn't feel scared.

What advice do you have for another student who is having a hard time in school?

Try doing your work, make it fun, if you're feeling sad or mad about school, chill out, everybody's too serious about it. They're way too serious around here. You do something that is funny the teachers rag on you for a week or so.

We thanked Joseph for sharing his thoughts and feelings about school. Joseph's teachers tell us that when Joseph misbehaves he is really trying to tell us something. All behavior serves some purpose for people, and their difficult behavior may be the only way they can get what they need. In listening to Joseph we must not only attend to what he says, but also what the challenging behaviors are communicating. For example, when Joseph's mother heard him cry as an infant she may have naturally responded first by listening, then providing comfort while trying to figure out from the context what he needed. Does he want attention? Does he want me to stop a disliked activity (e.g., taking a bath)? Does he want to avoid a disliked activity (e.g., cutting his fingernails)? Does he want something (e.g., more milk, a toy that is out of reach, food)? Is he punishing me for leaving him with a new baby sitter? Does he want to play? Is he sick? Is he tired?

Joseph's mother probably dealt with crying by meeting his needs while teaching replacement behaviors for crying. Based upon the context, she may have thought, "Joseph you are hungry," and eventually taught him to say "juice," "banana," etc., to ask for food. When Joseph "cries out" at age 14, adults typically respond by trying to make him stop the difficult behavior rather than taking time to "decode" his message, meet his needs, and support him to express his needs in a more appropriate manner.

Based upon the literature[1] and our experiences, we find it helpful to think of challenging behaviors as communicating one or more of the following needs: attention (to draw attention to oneself); avoidance/escape (to end or avoid a disliked event or an activity); to get something (to protest the end of something liked or to obtain something); revenge (to punish others for something); self-regulation/coping (to regulate feelings such as fear, anxiety, anger, and energy levels); and play (to have fun).

Patterns of challenging behavior often assist in determining what the behavior is communicating. For instance, because Joseph acts hyper, walks around and is verbally disruptive when given math worksheets to complete, it is possible that he is trying to meet a need for attention and/or to avoid a boring assignment that may be too difficult for him. Joseph's needs might be supported by making math assignments more fun or gamelike. Perhaps he could do them cooperatively with partners to make them more fun and meet his need for attention. He could also be taught replacement behaviors for acting hyper and talking out such as, using an appropriate tone of voice without swearing, relaxation exercises to calm himself down, going on a "mission" when he needs to let off steam, and teaching him to ask for help when he cannot do problems. Joseph's story does not represent or speak for all students who experience problems in school, but it does provide insight on what life is like for students-at-risk.

Reflection Question

- What kind of supports do you think Joseph needs to feel successful and good about himself and school?

What Supports Do Students Say They Need?

The following is a student's description of how educators need to support them:

> *Teachers need to focus on more than just the part of me that's a student. They need to focus on the whole person. If they do that, they might be able to figure out why kids are committing suicide, why kids are cutting school, why kids are heading for drugs and alcohol instead of keeping their minds cool and using their smarts to make this a better place. Yeah, they see me as a student. I am a responsibility to them. They need to look at the student and see, well, he or she could be having a problem because of this or that and that something needs to be changed. They need to broaden their view on not just being a teacher. They need to let go of the fact of being just a teacher and be the student's friend and take an interest in what's happening to the student.*
>
> 11th grade student

We have reviewed the literature and interviewed over 80 students with and without challenging behavior about what supports they need to feel successful and good about themselves and school. The following is a summary of what students indicate they need.

What kids need

- Friends who care for you and you for them.
- Fun and challenging things to do.
- Having choices and learning how to make choices.
- A chance to master skills needed to pursue a dream, for self advocacy, and cultural interdependence.
- Physical well-being.
- Status and a "cool" reputation.
- Unconditional love, someone who will always be your advocate.
- Chance to make a difference in someone's life.

But what if a student is extremely distant or reacts violently? We feel that our goal, to build supports and positive relationships, remains the same. Supporting and caring about someone during times of need is never a mistake.

Reflection Questions

1. From your experience are there additional student support needs, other then those listed above?
2. How well does your school meet the student needs listed above?
3. What factors help your school in meeting these needs?
4. What factors hinder your school in meeting these needs?
5. What changes could your school make to meet these needs?

Another critical factor for developing supports for students and preventing challenging behaviors is to carefully listen to what educators who have had experience addressing challenging behaviors have to say. Now we turn to Joseph's science teacher to describe her experiences teaching Joseph. Diana has been teaching science to eighth graders for 15 years. She describes her training as "traditional" which did not include strategies on how to accommodate for students who present challenges. As you listen to her story ask yourself...

...what does Diana need to get through the day;
...in what ways does she get support; and

...in what ways does including students who present behavior challenges in her class affect other students.

What Diana Has to Say

Diana, describe the ways in which teaching Joseph has affected you as a teacher?

It has clearly made me aware of what all kids need, even simple things like praise or attention. And now I notice how my reaction to certain situations affects things at any one time. I've also learned that there are children such as Joseph, that need different ways of being taught. My values and my background are different than Joseph's. I realize that I cannot force my values and my background upon this kid, and I have to change some of my own thinking and teaching style.

Describe the ways in which being in your class has affected Joseph?

He's a bright young man. He's trying to learn ways to help him focus. I think at times he has been bored and not real happy with school in terms of academics. I think he's looked at school as being a very restrictive place. We've tried to make it much less restrictive, by providing him with opportunities to do activities he is good at and with people he likes. I've learned to build on his strengths rather then focusing on his weaknesses. It's important to clearly define what you are going to do, what you expect from him and from the whole class. I try to remember to congratulate him for the little things. I guess I am more flexible now than I was before.

We did a science experiment this morning where he was with a group of friends and he absolutely loved it. He was very active, very involved. He was a real leader, he took charge of his group. And what ended up happening is that it generalized to how he performed the rest of the day. It was great to see him continuc in such a positive mode, working collaboratively with other kids and trying to help them.

Being in the regular classroom provides positive role models, both adults and kids. He needs to see other boys that are behaving positive, and still having fun. I am pleased with some of the friendships he has made because he seems to gravitate towards the kids in class that are more positive role models.

He doesn't like to be pulled away from the other kids for tutoring or special activities. He feels that singling him out is embarrassing and resists it. I think if he wasn't in a classroom with his peers it would be detrimental to his self-image. When he is doing some hands on activities with other kids where he can interact he doesn't have to be the center of attention. That frees me up in terms of spending time with other kids. When the kids help each other, *when someone is there who can make the right choice, a situation that may be getting out of hand just simmers right down.*

Any accommodation we made for Joseph was something that benefited all the kids. We did cut him some slack, but the rewarding activities were provided for everyone, not just for Joseph. We did this so he wasn't singled out, so that the other kids didn't feel that he was getting some special treatment. Some kids don't understand, they think sometimes he wrecks their fun but other kids know better, they try to be friends, they're not so quick to tease. I think some of the children's attitudes come from home. But overall, I think they've done well with it.

Describe how having Joseph in your class affects the other students?

It's a good experience for kids to be exposed to someone who is having a difficult time. I can see some real good benefits because kids are learning how to deal with people when they are having problems and that should be a help later on. But there are also times when I think he can be disruptive and my time is taken away from education in general. So I go back and forth, but on the whole I think this is the best place for him.

Some students are more sensitive to his needs. Families are still having a hard time with it. I think we need more education for families and getting families involved more.

The team allowed Joseph to bring in other kids to help out with the design of his program, to do some new activities with him, and its allowed him to start developing some friendships. Also, I've been getting feedback from the kids. Sometimes other children will tell me after a lesson that they think Joseph couldn't handle the situation that way. It helps to know. I've learned to use other students as valuable resources for supporting him to meet his needs.

What are Joseph's needs?

Sometimes its hard to figure out what he needs. In the beginning of the year I thought he was wandering around and leaving the classroom as a way to manipulate me. Initially, I would not let him back into the class as a punishment for leaving. Now I realize that he leaves because he's so nervous and its a way for him to deal with what is going on. It's funny because now I'm actually rewarding him for moving around as a way to keep him from blowing his stack. You really need to take the time to figure out what is going on from his perspective.

My worst nightmare would be to go back to the days when he refused to listen and did whatever he wanted. He's a strong-minded kid; he knows what he wants and usually tries to get it. He was lashing out at a lot of different people including myself. He was so angry and so confused because I don't think he understood what was going on in his own life.

When the plan we've designed is working and Joseph is able to dis-

charge his anger in a way that doesn't hurt anyone it's wonderful and he can really contribute to the lesson. When its not working I'd like another pair of hands. He can really upset the classroom at a world record rate. One comment that he makes quite frequently is: "Why don't you just kill me? You know I might as well be dead."

I think it would be nice if he had a circle of friends that were consistent enough to rely on. I'm not sure if he has that. I think sometimes he seems very sad, I don't know how to describe it other than sad. Very lonely at times. I think ideally it would be good to focus on getting him to do things that you know he can be successful at, so he can feel good about himself. Maybe encourage him to get involved in activities that other students think are "cool" to create a more positive image for himself.

I think there are times when he needs to know the expectations of a situation and follow the rules just like everybody else. But I also think that there needs to be some kind of safety valve for him, where if he feels he's getting out of control he can do something to calm down. He likes situations where he can make some of the decisions, where he has some of the control and some of the choice.

What do general education teachers need to be able to teach all students?

I think there should be some sort of support group for the teachers. My first year I was here, I had a kid named Roger and I felt I was the worst teacher in the world, that I had failed miserably. I thought a lot about quitting. There were a couple of people who saw me struggling and pulled me aside and provided some support that I needed. But it certainly was not set up and established. The difference between this year and that year is that I have quite a bit of support this year from the team.

You need community support too, having the families of other kids up in arms is going to decrease your ability to help all the kids.

I feel Joseph would probably be exhibiting a lot of difficult behavior regardless of who was his teacher. I think teachers have to know that this is a tough process to deal with these types of behavior, you wind up being tired and exhausted. And that even though you do make mistakes that doesn't mean that you are a failure. The first time you interviewed me I really felt Joseph didn't like me. At this point he may not be my greatest fan but he knows I'm fair and that I care. That somebody is there who's taken his gruff and has not left.

Describe your experience with being part of Joseph's individual support team.

I like the teaming process because it brings us all together. We all buy into the process and when we all buy into a kid, it is like putting a protective blanket around him, and he became a little bit of a part of me. Working with a team helps me to anticipate when he might be having a bad day and *prepare for it. My expectations change when I see that he is having trouble and that can stop a big problem from happening. But there is no perfect solution. What worked yesterday may not work today even though he does need some consistency. I'm constantly balancing between being creative and flexible with being predictable.*

Working closely with the family is important. Talking with the child and having the family see that their child has bonded with you, that they trust you as much as possible. Having his Dad come in and Joseph seeing his Dad with his teachers talking, laughing. I think that did a lot. Since Joseph has been on the team he has told us very private things that he never mentioned before. I think he trusts us a lot.

We need a lot of support from the administration which we have here. We need open lines of communication with everyone that deals with that student, including the family. The opportunity, the time to sit down and discuss with everyone what's going on, what is working and what's not. To ask what other resources do we have and try to find ways that maybe would work better then what we are doing. We need to make changes and replace something that is not working.

Describe the lessons that Joseph has taught you.

He has made major changes because he is now comfortable with the school. In the beginning he would say don't come near me and don't ask me to do anything.

I guess realizing that everyone has something to offer. Maybe we do it a little differently, or we need little extra accommodations to achieve something. To be honest, teaching Joseph has brought out the best and worst in me. The best is when I really see and do the extra accommodations. The worst is when I become frustrated and short tempered and I know that I'm being less than understanding of the real needs of this kid. It's the pressure I put on myself when I think about what I should be doing compared to what I am doing that will sometimes bring out the worst in me.

Well, its forced me to look at the way I present my material. Not to try just to teach to the middle. A lot of times, right now it's forcing me to work a little harder. It's forcing me to use other methods to get the message across. I think just the way I present the material and my focus has been a lot different. Its given me more confidence as a teacher, especially in working with students with emotional problems or other disabilities. Its shown me I can do it. I would never have thought that a year ago.

We thank Diana for honestly describing her successes and struggles as a teacher. Diana and Joseph both described how active learning (e.g., cooperative learning, hands on meaningful activities as opposed to lectures and work sheets) is the best kind of learning. Diana's story defines a number of issues that influence her attitude towards Joseph and her teaching. She is simultaneously barraged by what the community wants, the philoso-

phy of her school, the curriculum she was hired to teach, and trying to meet all of her student's needs.

In dealing with challenging behavior teachers often feel that they are captive in a demand situation where it is expected that they be "in control" and students are to "obey." Some teachers believe "if I can gain control over this student, then I can teach him." In Diana's interview one of the conflicts we hear her wrestling with is the need for Joesph "to know the expectations of a situation and follow the rules just like anyone else," and on the other hand to meet Joseph's need for a "safely valve" and to "make some of the decisions, where he has some of the control and some of the choice." The issue that Diana is struggling with is the use of an outside authority to change a student's challenging behavior versus teaching students to manage their own behavior.

In the outside authority approach, *teachers* are taught how to control behaviors through the establishment of clear rules and consequences for appropriate and inappropriate behaviors. In the self-management approach *students* are empowered to make choices about how to behave and are taught ways to cope that include problem solving and managing negative emotions. Teaching students to regulate their own behavior is useful in addressing emotions such as anger and frustration. For example, when Joseph is faced with situations in which he is accused of something, teased, embarrassed, or frustrated, he may have an emotional reaction which makes it difficult or impossible for him to handle the situation in an appropriate manner. Depending on the situation, Joseph could be taught to use a variety of strategies to deal with his emotions such as, leave the room until he calms down, count to ten before responding, do a relaxation exercise.

Sole emphasis on an outside authority to administer rewards and punishment can make students overly dependent on teacher interventions to manage their behaviors. By teaching students to regulate their own behavior, they become less dependent on the presence of teachers and their interventions. Some advantages of enabling students to change their own behavior are: it involves students actively participating in the development of their programs, encouraging them to take responsibility for their behavior; it promotes the development of flexible coping styles which adapt to different situations across a variety of settings; it teaches students skills that can be used to prevent challenging behaviors from occurring; and students may learn to manage their behavior even when interventions have been removed and there are no teachers present to supervise.[2]

Strategies based on adults dictating rules and delivering consequences are often used with students who present challenging behaviors because they have not learned to manage their own behaviors. One long term goal for students should be to progress from an outside authority telling them what to do to managing their own behavior. Diana's story does not represent or speak to the experiences and support needs of all teachers, but it does provide insight on what life is like for teachers addressing the needs of students with challenging behavior.

Reflection Questions

1. What kind of supports do you think Diana needs to be successful?
2. Reflect on the discipline policies of your school, and examples of how discipline problems in your school are addressed. Are the methods used to address challenging behavior in your school dependent on an adult to control student behavior or are they oriented towards empowering students to manage their own behavior?
3. What things do you do or have you observed others do to encourage students managing their own behavior?

What Supports Do Educators Say They Need?

One irony in education is that the people who have been entrusted with the job of empowering students, at times are not empowered themselves. We spend considerable time and money assessing student needs but not our own. In this regard we interviewed educators asking, "If you were provided unlimited access to resources, describe what you need as an educator?"

What educators need

- Caring & supportive colleagues.
- Diversity of experiences.
- Able to make decisions that affect their job.
- Opportunities for further training.
- Physical safety.
- Being valued by their students, school and community.
- A chance to make a difference in someone's life.
- To work as a team with families.

On any given day, you can always count on Alicia to report the "good news" about Joseph. Alicia and Joseph are important to one another and she is one of the people who knows him best. She provides unconditional love and support in times of crisis and laughs at his jokes repeated "ad nauseam." As you may have guessed, Alicia is Joseph's mother. As you listen to Alicia's story ask yourself...

...is she an equal partner with educators in planning to help Joseph?

...is she recognized as a source of wisdom and knowledge about Joseph?

What Alicia Has to Say

Tell me about Joseph?

They labeled Joseph severely emotionally disturbed, but I don't believe that he is "severely" emotionally disturbed. I believe he has some problems dealing with emotions and controlling his behavior. But, when you hear the label severely emotionally disturbed, you picture somebody like in the Texas Chainsaw Massacre. Now that guy was severely emotionally disturbed. I don't see Joseph like that. People also label him as being a troublemaker, a delinquent or problem child and I worry that all the labels are going to stick and follow him as he gets older.

What are Joseph's strengths, gifts and talents?

He is smart, very bright, very energetic, he loves sports. He is really good in music and working with computers. He relates well to adults. He is a good communicator. He can be caring, very loving too.

What is your worst nightmare about Joseph's future?

I want to see him grow up and reach adulthood while I'm still around. I worry about what would happen to Joseph if anything happens to me. I'm the one who's been most involved with him through all the hard times. I think I'm Joseph's best advocate. So, until he's ready to advocate for himself, I want to make sure that he's advocated for properly. Everytime I try to pick a guardian, something comes up and I don't see the person handle him the right way. I see that their attitude towards him changes. So trying to find the right guardian or advocate for him is my biggest fear.

Does he have any friends?

We live in an isolated area so he doesn't have much involvement with kids after school. Sometimes he visits friends. A lot of kids have responded *all right to Joseph. But, the way kids perceive Joseph is more a reflection of how their families or teachers treat him. If the adults treat him like he's different, then the kids treat him different.*

He's been the focus of negative gossip among the teachers and the office personnel. Sometimes they humiliate him by making comments right in front of him. Last year they never cut him any slack. Every time he got involved in an activity he always got in trouble and there was disciplinary action taken. He was more likely to be disciplined then anybody else.

This year I hope that he gets into clubs or something at school so he can be with people because that's what he needs. Something like that outdoor club he was part of last month, he really liked that. He went hiking and camping with some teachers and other students and had a great time. Things like that teach him how to interact with people and give him a chance to be accepted by others.

Does he belong to any community teams or clubs?

I don't allow him to go anywhere I believe there is going to be a negative influence or a negative adult who doesn't know how to control their own behavior. It's not really being overprotective, it's just knowing that some people in difficult situations are no good for Joseph and that there are places that he can go where the adults know how to be adults.

How could schools be different?

I think that they should better listen to what a family says about their kids and the things that they know work. I think that they should throw away their rules on conformity and start from scratch. Last year they weren't very flexible. Either you fit into the mold and did your work or you didn't fit in at all. But everybody is different. There is no kid that is just like any other kid. Everybody is in a class of their own because each kid is an individual and you can't have the same expectations for everybody.

If they want the kids to respect the justice system when they get older, they have to have a justice system in the school that is actually fair. Some of the adults here need to be monitored for how they treat the kids. You know, a family can say just about anything to their kid and the kid may have hurt feelings, but the family can rebuild the relationship. But if a kid hears the wrong thing from somebody at school or if they are treated unfairly at school, it follows them. Some people aren't as emotionally involved and they don't feel it's necessary to take the time to make things right with the kids.

Describe a positive experience you've had with the school?

This year things have changed dramatically, for the better. In the meetings we had, we made sure that Joseph received his services in the classroom. His teachers were really a tremendous help. Finally, people have come around to see that he needs to be in the classroom and not to pull him out be-

cause it doesn't work. Last year, he was always pulled out and made to feel like he was different or in special ed. And that has been a real problem throughout his life. For years he's been asking us not to pull him out and finally, this year, his wishes were heard. So, he's doing a lot better. Some of the kids make fun of him, but others understand and try to help him.

What is it like being on the team?

Since we've had this group together, I'd say that we've come a long way with Joseph. I'd say that he's done a lot better. Last year he was out of school more than he was in school because they would just kind of shove work at him and there was no way he could do it. So he was always acting out. This time with these group meetings, everybody knows what is going on, everybody has input which is good. Even Joseph has input into what's going on. That way, he doesn't feel that everybody is working behind his back and planning to do things against him.

What do teachers and students need?

I just think that every classroom should have a teacher and another pair of hands. I don't mean an aide to pull kids over to the corner, and only work with one special ed kid. I mean an aide to work with that kid in a small group setting and just to allow more flexibility.

What do you think are the most important things for Joseph to learn in school?

How to get his needs met by using his language. Also, with the team, we were able to work with the teachers at not stressing academics with him so much. We concentrated on first building his self-esteem, and now the academics are starting to move along.

We thank Alicia for describing her positive experiences, and the obstacles she has encountered advocating for Joseph.

Reflection Questions

1. **After listening to Alicia, what kinds of support does Alicia need from educators?**
2. **What kind of support does she think Joseph needs? Based upon Joseph's interview, do you think she is right?**
3. **Do families have equal status and is their input valued on teams in your school?**

What Supports Do Families Say They Need?

Alicia's story is an example of how families and educators working together can create a successful school experience. An important characteristic of listening to families is recognizing that the needs of each family are highly individual. However, the Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health[3] suggests that the needs of families of children who present behavioral challenges revolve around the following themes.

What families need

- Respite care — a break for families from the daily stress of taking care of their children.
- Day care, after-school and recreational programs.
- Timely information.
- Improved communication with the school system (not just when the child or family has "done something wrong").
- Education for regular classroom teachers and fellow students on the pain and needs of students who present behavioral challenges.
- Tutoring and advocacy for students who present behavioral challenges.
- Respect for the family's values and views.
- Professionals using plain and simple language when communicating with families and students.
- Financial assistance for families so their children who present behavioral challenges can stay with them.
- A court system which is educated on issues for children and adolescents with emotional and behavioral disabilities.
- Professionals in private practice in the community (e.g., doctors, dentists, optometrists) who understand children who present behavior challenges and are willing to work with them and their families.
- Education of students who represent behavioral challenges in their local communities so the communities can observe and use the families' strengths.
- Supports for life after high school for student who present behavioral challenges (e.g., support in finding and keeping a job, going on to school, opportunities to prepare for life experiences in the real world).

Reflection Questions

1. How closely do these needs match with support needs expressed by Alicia?
2. Are these supports available to families from your school or other agencies in your community?
3. How could your school cooperate with other agencies in providing such supports?

Keys in addressing behavioral challenges are to listen to students, their families, and teachers, so as to develop a thoughtful support plan which meets their needs.

What Makes Support Plans Work?

Our goal, to develop supports which help prevent challenging behavior and build relationships, may be a simple idea, but it is not always easy to do. Over the years we have developed numerous support plans with student planning teams. Some were easy, but most needed lots of work. Our successes and failures taught us that plans that work have a solid foundation built on the following guiding principles:

- Empower kids by providing choices and sharing decision making;
- Build upon the student's strengths and positive attributes;
- Don't do it alone — form a collaborative team to support the teachers, student and family;
- Provide the student and family with input into and ownership of the plan;
- Base the plan upon a careful analysis of the student's underlying needs and supporting other ways to meet those needs;
- View difficult behavior as communication;
- Focus on building relationships that are fair and enjoyable for all those involved;
- Whenever possible develop student supports which prevent problems from occurring;
- Continue to question what you are doing and why; and
- Regularly monitor, trouble shoot, and change the plan as needed.

Plans that work view teaching and learning as a dynamic process in which flexibility is critical. Implementing a mechanical, step-by-step plan may be easy but it is very unrealistic, ineffective and contrary to the human situation. Some of the best lessons we have learned from teachers are:

- Teaching is an art. It requires being sensitive to and adjusting for the moment-to-moment needs of our students;
- Teaching involves compromise and change; and
- Teaching requires adjusting teaching style to meet the needs of students and their personalities.

Reflection Questions

The teachers? They would probably say I was obnoxious, because when I get mad I get real wild. I tried to learn but it didn't work because I couldn't get along with the teachers. I used to get thrown out of class all the time. I used to get bored and fall asleep and he used to always come over and throw a book down and wake me up. Except for one day, I was in a bad mood and I put my head down because I had a headache. And he walked over and he whaled a book against the table and I jumped up and got a little ugly with him. I threw the book at him, and I hit him and I got in deep trouble for that.

6th grade student

1. If you were the student involved in this interaction, how would you feel?
2. If you were the teacher involved in this interaction, how would you feel?
3. What do you think the student's needs are? What motivates the student to act in this manner?
4. What do you think the teacher's needs are? Why is he reacting to the challenging behavior in this manner?
5. If you were placed in this situation, what would you do support the student's needs to help prevent another occurrence of this situation?

Chapter 2

Case Studies on How to Devise a Support Plan for Students with Challenging Behavior

Case Study #1: Malcolm's Story

Malcolm is 18 and just returned from spending four years at a residential school for students with serious emotional disturbance. He was sent home because the state cut off funding for his placement. Malcolm's family and teachers are caring people, but over the years they were often frustrated and "clueless" about how to "make him happy." To everyone's surprise Malcolm announced at his discharge meeting that he wanted to return to high school and enroll in college prep courses.

Malcolm moved in with his mother but within a week he decided to live with his father. He started school in September and had a full schedule of classes. He spent study halls in the planning room where he could take advantage of individual tutoring as needed.

He started walking in and out of his classes, sometimes two or three times a period. If his teachers insisted that he stay, within a short amount of time he would begin cursing and pacing. Sometimes he would be sent to the vice principal's office where he would beg for forgiveness and the opportunity to return to class.

The teachers heard rumors about Malcolm fronting stolen goods during lunch time. Their suspicions increased when a local thug burst into English class and started a fist fight with Malcolm. When he was told that he was suspended, he cried, pleading for another chance, stating that he would get into more trouble if he was kicked out of school for 2 weeks.

Team's Approach

- We, Malcolm's teachers, formed a team and committed to meeting once a week for 40 minutes—Malcolm's father was invited to join the team but had to work.
- We identified Malcolm's strengths and discovered he excelled in Math. We also learned that he hated going to the planning room because of the stigma associated with the resource room teacher. The team decided

that Malcolm could spend his study periods tutoring other students in Math.

- We spent several meetings collecting information about the problem behaviors and concluded that Malcolm was leaving class to control us. All except Malcolm agreed. We decided that if he left class he could not return that period. All except Malcolm agreed.
- Things got worse. Malcolm stayed in class but he was loud, calling out answers and cursing. Sometimes he would escalate to the point of slamming things around and storming out of class. We decided to take a closer look. We volunteered to observe in each other's classes, especially in Math class where Malcolm was a model student. We quickly discovered that Malcolm appeared to be quite anxious, especially if it was a difficult lesson. We also observed that when he knew the answer he was eager to participate, sometimes too eager.
- We revised our plan based on new hypotheses about the communication of Malcolm's behavior (see Figure 2.1, Malcolm's support plan). Instead of punishing him for leaving when he was anxious, we rewarded him. In fact, if we observed him becoming anxious and not leaving we would subtly cue him or send him on a "mission" out of the class.
- We found him a job so he would have a legitimate income.
- Malcolm continued to experience difficulties in social studies so we eventually dropped that class and he attended another math class.

Lessons Learned

- Working together in a team made the difference. We act as a resource for each other. Having someone else to talk to once a week was supportive.
- It was crucial to include Malcolm as an equal member of the team. Developing and modifying a plan without his input did not work. In addition it was valuable to encourage Malcolm to attend meetings with Chris, his closest companion. Having a friend with him enabled him to relax. A bonus is that Chris made great suggestions.
- Observing in each other's classrooms enabled us to accurately assess the communication of Malcolm's behavior and to identify what was influencing him to leave class. Once our intervention matched his needs the outbursts diminished.
- It took us until February to learn that Malcolm was living on his own (his father really lived somewhere else). Maybe this was why he was obsessed with getting money? Maybe he was selling stolen goods because he needed money to survive?
- In the beginning we believed that Malcolm was motivated and skilled enough to work. We had to spend a lot of time with him before we

Figure 2.1

STUDENT SUPPORT PLAN FOR MALCOLM

Student Strengths:

sense of humor
excellent artist
likes to cook
bright

intelligent
loves rock and roll
great math skills
wants to be with others

Activity/Class: Algebra II
Instructor(s): Ms. Latifah
Mr. Almedia

Student Supports:

- When assigning tasks, show relevance of task to other school work or personal life.
- Use peer partners or cooperative groups to locate answers to math problems.
- Make the activity feel like a game.
- Give a leadership role by having him explain a process or concept to the class. Pick a concept that you know he will do well.
- Help Malcolm find a job.
- Plan for transition for when he leaves school.
- Keep him focused in class by using hands on activities.
- Have Malcolm be a peer tutor for an underclassman.
- Have Malcolm lead class discussion.

Challenging Behavior:

- Abusive language: Shouts, swears and insults.
- Outbursts: Slams furniture and books while storming out of the room.

Communication of Behavior:

- Avoidance of failure
- Self-regulation
- Attention

Response When Behavior Occurs:

- Ignore the inappropriate behavior and reinforce the positive.
- Move closer and stand next to him.
- Have him make an apology and repair the relationship by doing a favor for the person he acted out on.
- Process with him what he can do instead.
- Peer partner provides feedback and encouragement to try again.

Replacement Behavior:

- Teach him that it is appropriate to speak out, yet he needs to practice appropriate tone of voice without swearing.
- Relaxation exercises to calm himself down and regulate himself.
- Going "on a mission" when he feels the need to blow off steam.
- Teach him to ask for help when he feels he can't do a problem.

How to Teach the Replacement Behavior:

- Role play with entire class, how they can "speak out", without getting upset or upsetting the other person.
- Role play using a cue to go on a "mission" and practice going to a safe place to cool off.
- Frequent feedback and guided practice of his appropriate behavior.
- Provide multiple opportunities to use the skills within the class period.

If individualized instructional materials are necessary, who will develop the student's materials?

Ms. Maguire

Who will support the instructor to implement the plan?

Mrs. Yuan

Other Relevant Skills:

- Study skills
- Advanced painting
- Singles cooking

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learned that he needed help getting a job because he was too anxious during job interviews.

- We regret the lack of family involvement. Maybe we would have figured out earlier that Malcolm was living on his own.
- We had to relinquish control in many ways. In November Malcolm insisted on transferring to honor classes. We simply listened first, and then arranged for him to spend a day visiting honor classes. At the next team meeting he asked if his schedule could remain the same because the honor classes looked too difficult. The more we were able to let go, the more he learned to control himself.

Case Study #2: Allison's Story

Allison is 8 years old and attends 2nd grade in her neighborhood. She lives with her grandmother, father and three siblings. Since she has been in school, Allison's teachers have reported that she engages in disruptive and aggressive behaviors towards her classmates. Her teachers have stated that Allison will frequently talk-out in class, especially when someone is giving a presentation or lecture. She will also walk around the class when she should be sitting down and doing her assignments. Allison has also been known to initiate contact with her peers rather aggressively. She had been observed "pretending" to hit someone or shoving a peer. As a result of Allison's behaviors toward her peers, she has been restricted from playing with a group of children (i.e., interacting with only one or two kids at a time) during recess.

Allison has limited contact with children her age at home. Her grandmother has stated that she spends most of her time alone. She has also mentioned that she does not get along with her older sister who is developmentally delayed. Although Allison gets along with her younger brother, her grandmother is afraid that Allison's behaviors will have a negative impact on the younger child.

Allison's teachers and grandmother have noted that she has been caught stealing items from her classmates as well as from her teachers (e.g., taking things off their desk or school property). She has also been known to lie about these incidents when confronted by school faculty or her grandmother. As a result, Allison's grandmother fears that without an effective intervention, she will eventually be involved with the legal system or worse, incarcerated.

Although Allison exhibits these challenging behaviors, her teachers have also stated that she has positive characteristics as well. She likes being with people, loves and seeks physical contact (e.g., hugs, pats on the back) from others, learns well, is kind to certain peers, has a good sense of humor, loves books, and likes to be part of the class. Allison is also good at drawing/sketching and has had opportunities to share her talents with her classmates. In addition to this, Allison enjoys working on the computer and has been known to visit her former (first grade) teacher's classroom to do computer activities/games during recess.

Team's Approach and Lessons Learned

- We identified a small number of people to be part of Allison's team. Her kindergarten teacher agreed to participate because of the special relationship she has with Allison. Although we have years of experience working on individual student planning teams we recognize that a different approach is needed for each student.
- We started sending meeting notes to Allison's grandmother and she decided to join us. We were able to provide transportation one way which enabled her to attend.
- The most successful strategy we used was to teach Allison to be a peer tutor to read to the students in kindergarten.
- The special educator started a social skills class but Allison was frequently disruptive during the lessons. Many accommodations were tried but Allison was not successful. We eventually realized that the skills being taught were too advanced so we opted to elicit Allison's help to teach easier skills to younger children. It worked!
- Once a month the team published an update about the accomplishments and obstacles facing the team. This sparked interest and support from other educators.
- We built continuity for the upcoming year by including Allison's next year teacher on the team as of March.
- We involved Allison's classmates in the process. The kids participated in a number of brainstorming sessions to talk about how to prevent getting into trouble with Allison and how to respond if she tried to hurt them. The kids were amazing! They shared many new insights and demonstrated empathy towards Allison. The challenge was for us was to allow Allison and her classmates to resolve conflicts on their own. Figure 2.2 is a copy of the support plan devised by Allison's team.

Let's Talk About How to Devise a Student Support Plan for Students with Challenging Behavior

One of the hardest challenges faced by our student support teams has been to refrain from focusing on trying to eliminate the problem behavior without understanding why the child is acting this way in the first place. There is frequently a tendency for teams to be reactive rather than proactive because of the pressure to address a crisis situation and the limited time to

Figure 2.2
STUDENT SUPPORT PLAN FOR ALLISON

Student Strengths:

likes being with people
kind to (some) students
sense of humor
loves to read books
fast learner
likes to help others
enjoys active learning
likes to be involved in class activities

Activity/Class: Language Arts
Instructor(s): Mrs. Oberal
Mr. Cavanagh

[illegible]
- Have Allison [illegible] other [illegible] and/or teach a portion of [illegible] activity.
- When behavior is appropriate put points in the "I-can jar" or a note on her behavior chart.
- Have Allison carry a teddy bear or books while in line with the class or have her be line leader.
- Have Allison be the peer buddy [illegible] (a student [illegible] chair) [illegible] way.
- [illegible] entire class [illegible]
- When [illegible]
- [illegible]
- [illegible] to play & asking for toys.
- Instruct peers to give Allison attention when she behaves appropriately.

Challenging Behavior:
- Physically and verbally aggressive toward other students. (e.g., grabbing, pulling, shouting, and swearing).

Communication of Behavior:
- Attention

Replacement Behavior:
- Asking to play, rather than hitting.
- Saying "I'm angry" rather than verbally abusing other students.
- Asking for toys rather than grabbing and pulling at other students.

If individualized instructional materials are necessary, who will develop the student's materials?

Ms. Maguire

Response When Behavior Occurs:
- Prompting/cueing: Lets Allison know that she needs to chose a more appropriate way to get attention.
- Students tell her: "I know you want to play, but I don't like it when you hit. Try doing it this way..."
- Teacher warning: Allison I don't like it when you..., or Allison let's watch the video to see how we are doing.

How to Teach the Replacement Behavior:
- Pre-teach appropriate skill of talking in a nice way.
- Teach hand signal to ask for attention.
- Model appropriate ways to approach other students for attention.
- Provide ongoing feedback and guided practice of new skills. (Use video camera to tape class).
- Provide multiple opportunities for Allison to use the new skills within the class/school environment.

Who will support the instructor to implement the plan?

Ms. Maguire

Other Relevant Skills:
- Multiplication skills
- Reading Comprehension
- Gross Motor Movements

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meet and plan on an ongoing basis. However, in the absence of well thought out plans that address the reasons for a student's behavior, it is like shooting at a target with a blindfold on. Students tend to be creative and persistent. If the student's original need is not met, either the challenging behavior will persist or a new (and possibly more difficult) behavior will emerge.

Before teams "dive" into changing the student's behavior, they must first take responsibility for understanding the student's behavior, creating a supportive environment, and teaching the student new ways to cope and interact with others. Nine steps in developing a student support plan are listed below. In the following chapters we will discuss each step in some detail.

1. **Establish a collaborative team.**
2. **Identify the student's strengths.**
3. **Describe the challenging behavior.**
4. **Identify the communication of behavior.**
5. **Brainstorm and plan student supports.**
6. **Identify replacement behaviors and decide how to teach them.**
7. **Plan how to respond to challenging behaviors.**
8. **Select other relevant skills to teach.**
9. **Monitor progress and plan for transitions.**

Chapter 3

Establish a Team

Introduction

Genuine family-educator collaboration can be a powerful vehicle for success and coping. Working together during stressful times requires families and educators to disregard previous failed attempts to work as a team and to adopt a new way of thinking about collaboration. The following checklists are provided for you, and other members of teams you participate on, to assess and reflect upon how you may help each other develop more trusting relationships, improve problem solving, and avoid conflicts. They are adapted from guidelines for establishing and maintaining partnerships generated by the Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health.[4]

Collaboration Checklist for Educators

☐ Do I really believe that families are my equal, and in fact, are experts on their children?

☐ Do I speak plainly and avoid jargon?

☐ Do I actively involve families in all team tasks including developing, reviewing, evaluating and revising support plans?

☐ Do I meet at times and places convenient for the family?

☐ Do I respect the values, choices and preferences of the family?

☐ Do I share information with other professionals to ensure that services are not duplicated and that families do not expend unnecessary energy accessing services?

☐ Do I show the same respect for the value of families' time as I do for my own time by becoming familiar with pertinent student information before team meetings?

☐ Do I recognize and enhance the variety of strengths and coping styles of the family?

☐ Do I encourage the family to bring a friend or advocate?

☐ Do I tell each family about other families in similar situations, recognizing parents as a major source of support and information?

Collaboration Checklist for Families

☐ Do I believe I am an equal partner with educators and do my share of problem solving and planning to help my child?

☐ Do I clearly express my own needs and the needs of my family to educators in an assertive manner?

☐ Do I treat educators as individuals and avoid letting past negative experiences get in the way of a good working relationship?

☐ Do I communicate quickly with educators when significant changes and events occur?

☐ Do I maintain realistic expectations for educators, myself, and my child?

Collaboration Checklist for All Team Members

☐ Do I express hope through my attitudes and words, avoid blaming and stating absolutes like "always" and "never"?

☐ Do I initially agree to meet once a week?

☐ Do I show up to meetings on time and stay for the whole meeting?

☐ Do I help ensure that meetings are a safe place for all team members to express their feelings and thoughts (I avoid passing judgment on others)?

☐ Do I resolve and encourage other team members to resolve personal conflicts outside of team meetings?

☐ Do I commit sufficient time and energy to develop a support plan (Set aside at least 12 hours)?

☐ Do I avoid the temptation to develop a plan without understanding the communication of the student's behavior?

☐ Do I distinguish between fact and opinion when discussing challenging behavior?

☐ Do I follow through and complete tasks in a timely fashion?

What Is a Collaborative Team?

Collaborative student support teams are formed to provide support to students, their teachers and families. Collaborative teams can be composed of as few as two people, with varying perspectives and areas of knowledge and expertise. Team members work towards shared goals, equally assume leadership roles and task responsibilities, adopt group norms, and establish a process for solving problems and resolving conflicts. In other words, team members sink or swim together! The key is that members are supported and are not alone in addressing difficult challenges.

Common Team Functions for Student Support Teams[5]

- Provide support to the student's teachers.
- Enable student to have friends.
- Provide support to the student and his/her peers.
- Develop family support, communication and involvement.
- Problem solve specific learning or behavior issues with the student.
- Incorporate a prosocial skills curriculum into the classroom for all students.
- Identify and access necessary school and community resources.
- Develop long range educational plans for the student.
- Develop transition plans for movement to the next grade or school or adult services.
- Identify staff and family information and education needs.
- Re-assess classroom rules and discipline policies in regards to the student's strengths and needs.
- Develop, implement and evaluate specific instructional programs.

Who Should Be on the Team?

Should students and their peers be members of support teams?

Students need to be equal members of their support team. We have had success with students as young as 8 years old participating in all components of the planning process. They, better than anyone else, know what strategies will help them cope with frustrating situations. Empowering students as an equal team member can help them learn to solve problems, manage their negative emotions, improve their self-concept and enable them to develop and attain individual goals.

In addition, students should be provided the opportunity of inviting a peer to be a member of their team. (Confidentiality is maintained because the student chooses who to share this experience with and the team emphasizes the importance of confidentiality). Peers can provide moral support during the meetings and generate unique solutions to problems.

Should family members be included on support teams?

Yes. Family members know the student best, are there for the student on a daily basis, and are going to have to live with the consequences of the action taken by the team. *So why do educators sometimes experience difficulty working with families on teams?* Part of the issue may relate to differing perspectives, values and priorities, given their different roles with respect to the student. Parents often have more holistic and long term goals, while teachers are frequently concerned with current academic achievements. This is exemplified by the comments of Diane (Joseph's teacher).

> *During a recent team meeting there were two Math teachers expressing interest in having Joseph join their class. But unfortunately Alicia (Joseph's mother), Joseph and I were unable to agree on which Math teacher would best meet Joseph's needs. Alicia and I were looking at the issue from entirely different perspectives. I was focusing on Joseph's academic performance and weighing how the decision would impact on staff time whereas Alicia was more concerned with how the decision would impact on Joseph's whole life. I eventually realized that it was more important to go along with Alicia's choice of teacher. In the long run it would be better to have Joseph in a class that his mother was behind 100% and was willing to support. That way the teacher and Alicia could work together.*

Listening to different perspectives can generate a comprehensive plan that is beneficial to everyone. In addition, when planning a support system for a student with challenging behaviors, the family can be the school's greatest resource. We recommend involving the family in *all* aspects of planning right from the beginning.

Some benefits of family participation

- Knowledge of the full history of the student and a total picture of what is going on in the child's life.
- In-depth knowledge of the student's strengths, interests and needs, and the skills the student needs to function outside of school settings.
- Knowledge/ongoing experience of the most useful strategies for dealing with the student's behavioral challenges.
- Knowledge of the key support/resource people in the student's life.
- Knowledge of recent or ongoing stressors that may impact on the student's functioning at school.
- Knowledge of ways to promote prevention, teaching and response strategies across settings.

Example strategies for obtaining family input

Educators sometimes find that despite their requests, the family does not attend team meetings on a consistent basis. Rather than labeling the family as "uninterested" or "uncooperative", the team members should consider possible barriers to the family's attendance. These may include: lack of information about the nature of the school meetings, negative past experiences with the school (i.e., use of education "lingo", not feeling listened to, previous experience of feeling judged or blamed, not feeling like an equal member in decision-making) and practical issues (i.e., lack of childcare, transportation problems, conflict with job schedule). Consequently schools should consider the following suggestions when attempting to enlist family involvement on school teams:

- Visit with the family and discuss the need for developing a team to support the student.
- Encourage the family to participate in identifying who should be on the team.
- Invite the family members to be full participating members of the team.
- Set an initial meeting date, time and location with the family to insure their ability to attend.
- Encourage the family to bring a friend or advocate.
- Offer assistance in finding child care for meetings.
- Offer transportation to the meeting.

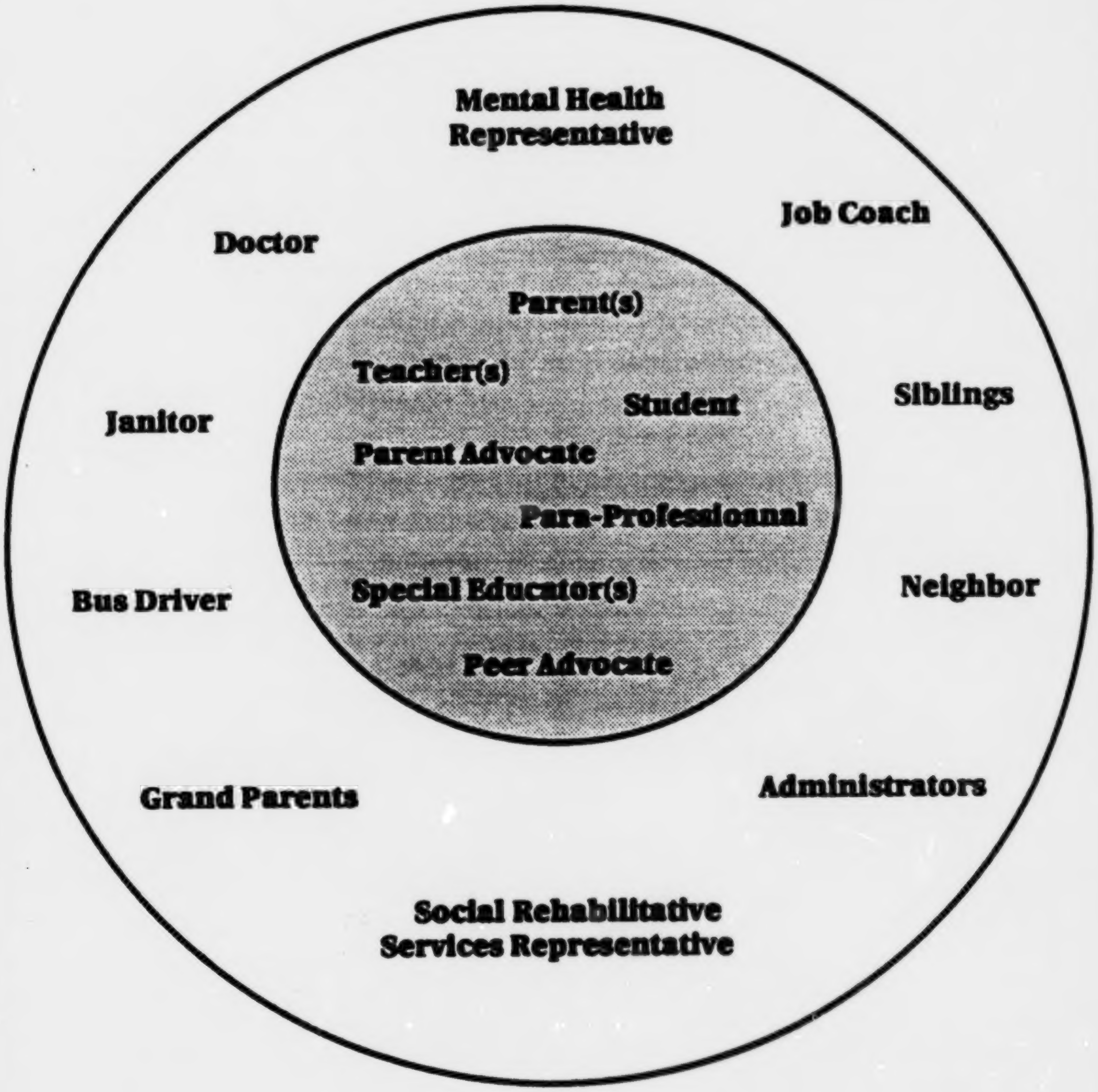
Who Else Should Be on the Student Support Team?

Ideally, the team would be selected jointly by the family, the student and the teacher. Team members should be the people most involved with the student on a day-to-day basis. Some students and families may be involved with or in need of support services through community health, mental health, child protective services, advocacy organizations, self-help groups or through private service providers (e.g., medical doctor, counselor, psychologist, visiting nurse). These service providers should also be involved in the Student Support Team process. At a minimum, community service providers and school staff must be aware of what each is doing to minimize duplication of services and ensure that services provided in school and in the community are not counter-productive, in direct conflict with each other, or confusing to students and their families.

Figure 3.1 illustrates potential team membership. The inner circle depicts the potential team members who meet on a weekly basis. The outer circle identifies other individuals who may be involved in the student's life but would not be needed for every team meeting.

Figure 3.1

STUDENT SUPPORT TEAM
MEMBERSHIP


Mental Health Representative
Job Coach
Doctor
Parent(s)
Teacher(s)
Student
Janitor
Siblings
Parent Advocate
Para-Professioanal
Bus Driver
Special Educator(s)
Neighbor
Peer Advocate
Grand Parents
Administrators
Social Rehabilitative Services Representative

How Do Collaborative Support Teams Make Decisions?

Collaborative teams make decisions by consensus. In this regard all team members must agree to all decisions. Coming to consensus on tough issues is not an easy task, but it is a necessary task. Knowing that consensus must be reached forces teams to become more creative and open to ideas when differences of opinion are voiced. Our experience is that coming to consensus takes more time, but a decision that everyone agrees to is a decision that will be implemented.

How Do Collaborative Support Teams Solve Problems?

There are many problem solving models from which teams can choose. However, common elements typically include the following steps:

1. recognize that there is a problem,
2. define the problem,
3. think of many solutions,
4. decide what to do,
5. try a solution, and
6. evaluate the results.

In brainstorming solutions it is useful to generate as many responses as possible. By forcing yourself to think beyond the obvious and suspending judgement, latter responses are often the most creative and can have the greatest potential for success.

How Do We Brainstorm?

In brainstorming, team members are given 2 or 3 minutes of **individual think time.** During think time each team member writes all their ideas on a piece of scratch paper. Next each member provides one of their ideas per turn in a round robin format (e.g., moving clockwise around the table). The recorder writes the idea on a flip chart or blackboard so everyone can see each idea as it is stated. The round robin continues until everyone has all of their ideas written on the chart. During round robin team members are encouraged to be creative and offer "far out" ideas. Other team members are not allowed to make comments or judgments about the ideas presented. There is no discussion or even rewording of ideas. Ideas are simply stated and written. When all ideas are exhausted the team takes 2 or 3 minutes of quiet wait time to see if any more ideas pop up. Typically during this time several new ideas are generated. Next, team members are free to discuss ideas, reword and combine ideas, eliminate ideas or create new ideas. After discussion the team selects the best ideas for action.

How Do Collaborative Teams Deal with Controversial Issues?

Collaborative teams are designed to deal with controversy because they are not competitive in nature. Since decisions are made by consensus, everyone must agree in order for the team to continue to work. The cooperative philosophy of collaborative teams requires that teams come up with creative, productive and successful solutions to problems. This is not to say that there will not be times when team members are at odds around a given issue. At times team meetings can become very uncomfortable and relationships can be hurt if controversy is not handled openly and honestly. Each collaborative team should set group norms, that is decide how they will behave when faced with controversy and establish a procedure for resolving conflicts.

Example of collaborative team norms

- The context for controversy should be cooperative.
- The emphasis should not be on who has the best answer, but to make the best group decision.
- Every team member should take an active part in group decisions. Ideas should be expressed openly and honestly without defensiveness.
- Every contribution should be valued, respected and taken seriously.
- Emphasis should be on viewing the issue under discussion from a variety of perspectives.
- Group members should be critical of ideas, not people. "I appreciate you, I am interested in your ideas, but I disagree with your current position" should be communicated.
- Members should not take personally other members' disagreements with and rejection of ideas.
- Members should encourage each other to express emotions during debate.
- The group should help all members, regardless of status, to speak out confidently. Avoid saying what you think your boss wants to hear!

Johnson and Johnson* suggest strategies in negotiating resolutions to conflicts

1. **Confront the opposition** — express your view of the conflict and your feelings about it and at the same time invite the opposition to do the same. Don't hit and run. Confront only when there is time to jointly define the conflict and schedule a negotiating session.

2. **Jointly define the conflict** — define a conflict as a mutual problem to be solved, not a win-lose struggle. Do not label, accuse or insult the opposition.
3. **Communicate positions and feelings throughout negotiations.**
4. **Take the opponent's perspective** — try to understand your opponent's position.
5. **Coordinate motivation to negotiate in good faith** — there are costs and gains for each party in resolving the conflict. To increase the motivation of another group member to negotiate, you need to increase his costs for continuing the conflict and reduce his gains. To decrease another person's motivation to negotiate, decrease his costs and increase the gains for continuing the conflict.
6. **Reach an agreement** — all participants need to be satisfied with the agreement and committed to abiding by it. The agreement should specify the joint position on the issues being adopted. It should also include provisions for future meetings to check how well the agreement is working and how cooperation can be improved.

Once the team is established and members have defined the ways in which they will operate, it is now time to focus on planning for the student with challenging behavior. In the next chapter we describe how teams gather information about the numerous aspects of the student's life. This information will provide the foundation for building a support plan for the student experiencing difficulties.

Reflection Questions

1. Given the description of a collaborative team, are the teams you are on collaborative? Why or why not?
2. From your experience on teams, what are the biggest barriers to teams functioning collaboratively? What could be done to break down the barriers?
3. What are the primary factors that support good teaming in your school?
4. What are the primary factors that hinder good teaming in your school?

Chapter 4

Getting to Know the Student

Identify Student Strengths and Needs

To generate a support plan which prevents challenging behaviors and builds relationships, the team needs to carefully analyze a student's strengths and needs. Before developing a support plan the team should determine to what extent the behaviors are related to factors in the student's environment, current circumstances or past history (reactions to medication, substance abuse or a death in the family). The team members who are the best sources for obtaining this information are the student and their family. Other agencies or professionals which are involved with the family should also be consulted. Team members should actively listen and support each other in obtaining and providing this information. The goal is to obtain information and problem solve to develop a comprehensive support plan which addresses acute sources of stress (such as divorce or death of a parent) and daily situations which are challenging. Assigning a team member the role of taking notes and all other team members the role of asking questions which address the pertinent information is one way to facilitate the process. Some of the critical areas to explore prior to developing a support plan are listed below.

What are critical questions to explore?

1. What are the student's strengths that the plan should build on?
2. What are the student's and family's goals that should be addressed in the plan?
3. Who are the people (e.g., brother, sister, friend next door, doctor) and what are the activities that are important in the life of the student?
4. What other agencies, if any, are currently working with this student? How do we coordinate activities with these agencies?
5. From whom has the student received services in the past?
6. How does the student communicate (e.g., request attention, request help, indicate pain, request a break in activity, indicate his/her feelings are hurt, indicate confusion or frustration, reject or protest a difficult, boring or dangerous situation, respond to positive and negative attention)?

Why is it important to focus on student strengths and interests?

Students who present behavior challenges are typically described primarily in terms of their inappropriate behavior and other areas of need. Such deficit-based descriptions focus on the negative, emphasize student differences, and paint a despairing picture. A narrow focus on students' weaknesses provides little information on how students can best be academically, socially or emotionally supported. A deficit focus can quickly lead to the conclusion that students need isolated, specialized programs rather than support plans for inclusion. Highlighting students' strengths and interests provides essential information on how they might be supported and motivated to actively participate in general education activities. For example, recognition of Joseph's strengths and interests (i.e., smart, energetic, loves sports, good with music and computers, relates well to adults, good communicator, caring, and loving) facilitates the development of a positive support plan based on the abilities, talents and gifts he can contribute to the school community.

Why is it important to emphasize the goals of students and their families?

To be successful, student support teams should focus on the whole person, not just the "student" part of the person. When developing support plans, teams need to look beyond grades on a report card and the number of suspensions and detentions. They need to focus on what is important in the life of individual students and their families. Asking students and families to share their goals facilitates teams taking a more supportive and holistic approach to planning. Students' and families' goals may include self-esteem, friends, safety, a job, fun, staying out of trouble, etc. Supporting students and families in achieving their goals should facilitate achievements in other areas. For example, Joseph's mother, Alicia, indicated that when his team "concentrated on first building his self-esteem…the academics moved along."

Why is it important to determine how students communicate needs?

Many students who present behavioral challenges use nonconventional or inappropriate behaviors to communicate their basic needs and to react to events. For example, students may communicate that they are in a frustrating situation and need to escape by acting out. It is extremely important for all team members to become knowledgeable about how individual students' typically communicate their basic needs (e.g., attention or a break in activity) so they can support students to meet their needs and use more appropriate ways to express them. For example, when a student puts her head down on the desk the teacher might assume that she is being disrespectful and reprimand her. However, if the teacher knows that the student typically puts her head down when she has a headache, the teacher

45

might ask if her head hurts, prompt her to express her need, and allow her to either see the school nurse or to leave her head down until she feels better. Another example is when a student stops working and starts talking to classmates. If the teacher can recognize that the student is anxious and needs a break from the activity, he can prompt the student to express his need for a break and allow him to take one. Learning how to "listen" to the student's communications, whether they be words, actions or body postures, can greatly enhance our ability to develop plans which support students to meet their needs and facilitate them learning more appropriate ways to express them.

Reflection Question

- Think of a student who presents challenging behavior. Can you answer the "Critical Areas to Explore" questions concerning the student? Why do you think it is important to have this information when developing a support plan for the student?

The team needs to take into consideration that there are numerous aspects of students' lives that may be effecting their behavior. In pursuit of the "bigger picture," we have listed other factors to consider before developing students' plans.

Factors which may impact upon the student's ability to meet basic needs or benefit from instruction[7]

1. Medications.
2. Health concerns.
3. Social concerns (e.g., inappropriate sexual conduct, language, teasing, lack of friends).
4. History of substance abuse.
5. Recent stressful events (e.g., birth, death, abuse, loss of job, move to a new home).
6. The student's eating routine.
7. The student's sleep cycle.
8. The variety of activities the student engages in on a typical day (e.g., types and amounts of physical activity, class work, play, music, art).
9. How often the student is able to make choices about food, clothing, friends, school activities, and home activities.
10. The number (density) of people in an environment (home, class).
11. Use of teaching methods which facilitate or inhibit student success.

Reflection Question

- With the same student in mind, review the Factors Which May Impact Upon the Students. Do you know how each of these factors is or is not impacting upon the student? Why would it be important to have this information when developing a support plan for the student?

Once all background information has been collected, the team should support students and their families in addressing those factors which may be contributing to the challenging behaviors. It must be emphasized that, in many cases teams will not have members with the expertise, time and resources to support students and their families to deal with issues such as child abuse, health concerns, death in the family, depression, trauma and substance abuse. To support students and families to address such issues, teams need to either coordinate their efforts with agencies and professionals already addressing them, refer students and families to agencies and professionals who can address the issues and coordinate efforts, and/or through contractual or other arrangements add members to the team with the necessary expertise, time and resources. Developing a comprehensive support plan includes enabling the student to cope with acute sources of stress, reduce the amount of stress in a student's life (e.g., modify activities or curriculum) and teach the student to cope with general or daily sources of stress.

The next step is to take a closer look at the challenging behaviors. This involves describing the behaviors, identifying what typically happens immediately before and after them, and determining what needs the behaviors are communicating.

How Should the Challenging Behaviors Be Described?

The following steps are used to obtain an accurate description of the student's challenging behaviors.

1. List all challenging behaviors.
2. Define each behavior in observable terms.
3. Delineate the history (how long has the student used it), frequency (how often does it happen), and duration (how long does an incident last) of the behavior.
4. Rate the behavior for level of seriousness*:

Is the behavior distracting? *(Interferes with others' acceptance of the student. Difficult to be around).*

Is the behavior disruptive? *(Severely limits or seriously interferes with other people's functioning).*

Is the behavior destructive? *(Threatens the health or life of the child or others).*

5. Note if two or more behaviors occur at the same time and if one of the behaviors listed in step one usually precedes another in a chain of events.

Why should behavior be defined in observable terms?

Defining behaviors in observable terms involves describing behaviors in terms of actions that are "point-at-able". For example, the label lazy is not an observable term because it is not an action which is point-at-able. The label lazy does not tell us what students do. For example, lazy could mean that students do not do homework, turn in assignments in illegible handwriting, only partially complete assignments, etc. The following is a sample list of labels and point-at-able actions.

Label	Point-At-Able Actions
Lazy	Does not complete assignments
Hyperactive	Gets out of seat a lot
Rebellious	Talks back
Aggressive	Hits
Noncompliant	Refuses to follow directions

Defining behavior in observable terms is beneficial for at least three reasons.

1. It is easier to develop interventions. For example, it is easier to think of interventions to support students to complete homework then it is to support them not to be lazy.
2. It is easier to develop a measurement system to determine if interventions are having any effect. For example, it is easier to measure how many times a student hits then it is to measure aggression.
3. Labels typically over generalize and often inaccurately describe students in a negative fashion. For example, describing students as lazy because they do not complete homework does not take into consideration all the situations in which they may be industrious such as, putting in extra time practicing for the football team, holding a part time job, etc.

How many behaviors can be selected at one time?

If more than one challenging behavior is described the team will need to decide which behaviors to focus on first. Students and their families are very important in making this decision. Remember, even though students may exhibit several behaviors which interfere with learning or their ability to make and maintain friendships, it is unrealistic in most cases to target more than one or two behaviors at a time. Consider how difficult it is for you to change your own behavior (e.g., give up fatty foods, stop smoking). It will be just as difficult for students to change their behaviors, especially if the problem behaviors produce a desired result for them. In addition, most interventions require team members and possibly other adults and students to change their behavior also.

The information collected on the frequency and level of seriousness of the behaviors should assist teams in making decisions on which behavior(s) to focus on first. For example, it might be decided to leave behaviors which are less frequent or less serious for later. The observation that two or more behaviors occur at the same time and/or that one precedes another in a chain of events indicates that the two behaviors may be closely related and that intervention with one behavior might impact on the other(s). However, decisions on which behaviors to address first can only be made after determining what situations tend to occur before the behaviors; what strategies prevent the situations; what needs the challenging behavior communicates; and what behaviors will appropriately communicate the student's needs.

Reflection Questions

1. Using the student identified for the previous reflection questions, list his/her challenging behaviors in terms of point-at-able actions.

2. For at least two of the challenging behaviors

   - **Define the behaviors:** History (how long has the student used it), frequency (how often does it happen), and duration (how long does an incident last).

   - **Rate the behaviors for level of seriousness:**
     Is the behavior distracting?
     Is the behavior disruptive?
     Is the behavior destructive?

3. Note if two or more behaviors listed in step one occur at the same time and if one of the behaviors usually precedes another in a chain of events.

In the previous section on addressing *factors which may impact upon the student's ability to meet basic needs or benefit from instruction*, we were able to get a "big picture" of factors which may be contributing to challenging behaviors. Now that the behaviors have been defined, we can look for patterns of events which precede and follow them. This will help teams to identify more specifically what tends to happen before the behavior occurs and what need the behavior might be meeting.

How Can What Precedes the Behavior Be Identified?

Sometimes the relationship between a behavior and the preceding events is fairly obvious. For instance, Allison gets teased by Joey and runs out of the room crying. However, it is frequently the case that a more thorough assessment of situational factors is required to obtain a good sense of the patterns of behavior. This is accomplished by asking *who, what, where,* and *when* questions. The information gathered is helpful in identifying:

1. What times (when), places (where), specific people or groups (who), and activities (what) appear *most likely* to occur prior to the challenging behaviors, and
2. What times, places, activities and people or groups of people are *least likely* to occur prior to the challenging behaviors.

An initial step in finding out about the *who, what, where,* and *when* of a behavior is to ask a team member, who was present during recent episodes of the behavior, to answer the questions while describing an episode in detail. The team then asks, "Was this episode typical of what seems to happen when the student uses the behavior?" If team members feel it is not typical, then someone else is asked to describe an episode and answer the *who, what, where,* and *when* questions.

The identified factors which may impact upon the student and specifics of the who, what, where, and when of the behaviors can now be combined to help determine what seems to set off the behaviors. The team plays detective looking for patterns and explanations for the patterns. The students, their families and teachers will be a very important source for finding patterns and explanations for them. The team's search for explanations may lead to a need to gather more information before preceding. To illustrate how to play detective, a few possible lines of inquiring for understanding the patterns are provided. Think back to the detailed descriptions of recent episodes of the behavior discussed by the team as you do your detective work.

- Does the behavior typically occur on specific days of the week or times of the day? Is there something that consistently happens or does not happen at home or in school before these times that could contribute to the behavior occurring or not occurring?
- Does the behavior typically only occur in certain settings? What are differences in the settings (e.g., activities, people present) in which the behavior does and does not occur?
- Does the behavior typically occur in the presence of specific people or groups of people but not in the presence of other specific people or groups of people. What are the differences in the nature of interactions with the specific people or groups of people which may contribute to it occurring and not occurring?

- Does the behavior typically occur in specific activities and not in others. Is there a difference in how the activities are structured (e.g., high demand, hands on learning, lectures) which may contribute to it occurring or not occurring?

Answers to such questions will provide a basis for devising strategies to prevent the behaviors from occurring. Two possible prevention strategies are to avoid situations which seem to trigger the behaviors or to change the nature of those situations. Such changes can be temporary or permanent. The changes may be temporary when students will be learning to cope with specific situations which trigger challenging behavior. In order to teach students appropriate coping behaviors for responding to specific trigger situations, the needs that the challenging behavior communicates in those situations must be determined.

Reflection Question

- Using the behavior identified for the previous reflection question, attempt to identify what typically triggers it.

How Can What Follows the Behavior Be Identified?

Identifying what follows a problematic behavior does not involve any complicated strategies or series of questions. Team members simply need to describe or observe actual problematic situations for the student, and then note what happens immediately after the behavior. This could include: attention from other students in the class, both positive and negative; attention from other adults in the environment, both positive and negative; being ignored by everyone; receiving some kind of reward or punishment; getting to leave the environment; getting to stay in the environment; going to the principal's office, etc. This information is useful because it frequently helps team members identify consequences or situations which actually serve to maintain the student's problematic behaviors, as well as what the student's behavior communicates.

What Needs Do Challenging Behaviors Communicate?

As discussed in Chapter 1, all behavior is "meaning-full" and serves to meet some need. Through our experience working with teams addressing this issue, we have found it helpful to determine if challenging behavior communicates one or more of the following needs*.

Attention, the behavior serves the need to draw attention away from others and to oneself.

Avoidance/Escape, the behavior serves the need to end an event or activity that the student does not like or to avoid an event.

Control, the behavior serves the need to be in control of events.

Revenge, the behavior serves the need to punish others for something that was done to the student.

Self-Regulation/Coping, the behavior serves the need to regulate feelings (e.g., boredom, embarrassment, anger, fear, anxiety), energy levels, etc.

Play, the behavior serves the need to have fun.

Fortunately, patterns of events that precede and follow the behavior can assist in determining what needs the behavior is communicating. For instance, if Allison acts out when given written assignments, it is possible that she is trying to meet a need for attention or to avoid an assignment that is too difficult. If further examination of this situation confirms our hypotheses, this information can be used to develop a support plan for preventing the behavior and teaching appropriate replacement behaviors. For example, Allison's challenging behavior might be prevented by making sure written assignments are at a level where she can experience success and are meaningful or fun. Perhaps she could do them cooperatively with partners to make them more fun and meet her need for attention. She could also be taught replacement behaviors for acting out and clowning around such as, asking for help in an appropriate tone of voice.

Why do teams experience difficulty determining the needs challenging behaviors communicate?

There are at least six possible communications of behavior (i.e., attention, control, escape/avoidance, revenge, self-regulation and play). However, many of us tend to classify behavior into only two categories, attention and control, ignoring the other four possibilities. The assumption is that students *choose* to misbehave to either get attention (from adults or peers) or because they have a need to be in control of the situation. Challenging behaviors are seen as a control or compliance issue where it is typically expected that schools and teachers are "in control" and that students are to "obey."

Schools and teachers that view challenging behaviors as a compliance issue, typically rely on outside authority to define rules and set a standard of consequences for not following the rules (e.g., time-out in the classroom, loss of recess, phone call to the parent, sent to the office, suspension). The cause of the behaviors are not considered (e.g., the need to escape/avoid boring or too difficult assignments) and interventions are not individually based upon each student's needs. Initially the rules and consequences approach may work to lessen challenging behaviors. However, students who are not having their needs met (e.g., assignments which are at their level and involve active learning) may use the same or other behaviors to express and meet their needs. Because the problem is seen as a compliance issue the response is to increase the severity of the consequence for the challenging behavior. It's important to ask, however, what happens when a typical consequence (e.g., time-out or trip to the office) is given to a student who is trying to avoid a situation, or for a student who is trying to regulate anxiety based on an intense fear of failure? In some cases, the standard consequences actually reinforce challenging behaviors, making them stronger (happen more frequently or to a greater degree). Clear rules and consequences are an important component of school and classroom management. However, causes of behaviors and individual student needs should be considered before applying them.

Schools and teachers who hold strong beliefs that challenging behaviors are a compliance issue find it hard to rethink the issue in terms of preventing the behaviors through supporting students to meet their needs. To develop effective support plans, teams must try very hard to break out of old thinking patterns and analyze challenging behavior from different perspectives.

Another reason teams find it difficult to determine the needs challenging behaviors communicate is that some students use the same behavior to communicate several needs. For example, a student may disrupt the class by yelling out or throwing materials for attention in some situations, and to escape/avoid a difficult activity in others. The behavior may look exactly alike in both situations, but the function of the behavior is different and the support plan must also be different. In cases like these, careful analysis of the events surrounding the behavior in each situation in which it occurs is critical to identifying what the behavior communicates and developing a support plan which appropriately addresses each situation.

How Can the Needs the Challenging Behavior Communicates Be Identified?

There are many clues teams can use to help them determine what needs students' behaviors communicate. Some of the clues have been previously discussed and include: information from the *Critical Areas to Explore* on how the student communicates wants and needs; and the patterns of events which precede and follow the behavior.

The most obvious source of information on what needs a behavior communicates is to *ask the student*. This information source, although seeming obvious, is often disregarded. Students are used to giving pat answers such as "I don't know" or "You don't care anyway" and adults are used to discounting what the student says (e.g., "That's not what I saw," "Mr. Smith does too like you," "You don't mean that"). If we expect students to honestly answer our questions, we have to listen to them and resist the impulse to correct them or to disagree. When the students cannot be helpful or don't know why, the team should support them in helping the team sort through the other clues.

Once the information on how the student communicates and the patterns of events which precede and follow the behavior has been collected the team has enough clues to form an hypothesis on whether the behavior communicates a need for attention, control, escape/avoidance, revenge, self-regulation or play. Several hypothesis need to be formed when clues indicate that the student uses the same behavior to communicate several needs. In some cases teams may agree that the need the behavior communicates is rather obvious and feel that is it not necessary to further verify the hypothesis before using it to develop a student support plan. However, developing and implementing a support plan requires a lot of time and energy and in most cases the hypothesis should be further verified before using it as a basis for a plan. Two methods teams can use to further verify their hypothesis are to use a discussion format and/or conduct systematic observations of the behavior in a variety of situations.

How can a discussion format be used to further verify an hypothesis?

Figure 4.1 lists common behaviors that people do for attention, control, revenge, self-regulation, play and escape/avoidance. Do the student's patterns of behavior fit into any of these categories? For example, if the student's behavior seems to happen when the pressure to succeed becomes too intense, the student procrastinates or often fails to complete assignments, the behavior is preceded by physical complaints, or the behavior stops after you stop making demands then the behavior might fit in the category of escape/avoidance behavior. It should be cautioned that this matching of the student's behavior to the lists in Figure 4.1 is another piece of information for the team to consider and an exact match is not required.

Another valuable, but often overlooked piece of information, is to look at the reactions of classroom teachers or the parents who have experienced the behavior. How did they feel? What were their impulses? Figure 4.2 lists some common feelings and impulses people have when experiencing each category or behavior. For example, when the behaviors occur, do teachers or the parents feel angry or frustrated? Is their impulse to do something physically to the student? Do they feel like they are losing control of the situation? If the answers to all of these questions are yes, the team might be dealing with a student who is communicating a need to exert control. If teachers or the parents feel more irritated or frustrated, the team could be dealing with a student who is trying to regulate her own emotions or who is demanding attention. The impulse of teachers or parents in these cases might be to say something to the student rather than to do something to the student. The internal cues of teachers or the parents who have experienced the behavior is just one more piece of information to add to the team's understanding of what the student is trying to communicate. Taken alone, out of context, the reactions of caregivers may not mean much, but when added to all of the other information they can be extremely helpful to the team in deciding if the behavior best fits into one category.

Figure 4.1

COMMON BEHAVIORS ASSOCIATED WITH EACH COMMUNICATION CATEGORY

Attention

Possible Origins of Behavior

- Adults pay more attention to inappropriate then appropriate behaviors
- Student doesn't know how to ask for attention appropriately
- Student doesn't get sufficient personal attention
- Student has few friends
- Student has low self-esteem

Student Behavior:

- The behavior distracts teacher and classmates
- Behavior occurs when no one is paying attention to the student
- Behavior occurs when someone stops paying attention to the student
- Behavior occurs when attention is paid to someone other than the student
- Behavior occurs in front of valued peers
- Behavior occurs as a dare or result of peer pressure

Escape/Avoidance

Possible Origins of Behavior

- Unreasonable expectations by others
- Student's belief that only perfection is acceptable. Star mentality
- Emphasis on competition in the classroom
- Failure to be avoided at all costs
- The work is too difficult for the student

Student Behavior:

- Student does behavior when pressured to succeed
- Student procrastinates, fails to complete projects
- Student develops temporary incapacity or assumes behaviors that resemble a learning disability
- Student develops physical complaints
- The behavior occurs when the student is asked to do something she does not like to do
- The behavior stops after you stop making demands
- The behavior occurs in stressful situations

Control

Possible Origins of Behavior

- Society stresses dominant-submissive roles rather than equality in relationships
- Success is defined as achieving personal power
- Lack of control in person's life
- Past history of abuse/victimization

Student Behavior:

- When doing the behavior the student is disruptive and confrontational
- Quiet noncompliance — when doing the behavior the student is often pleasant and even agreeable
- Behavior occurs when an activity or event is taken away
- Behavior stops when student gets her way

Figure 4.1 continued

COMMON BEHAVIORS ASSOCIATED WITH EACH COMMUNICATION CATEGORY

Revenge:

Possible Origins of Behavior:

- A reflection of the increasing violence in society
- Media role models that solve conflicts by force
- Unjust society. Unequal treatment.
- Anger over personal circumstances or past "wrongs"
- Provocation by another
- Jealousy

Student Behavior:

- Behavior is hurtful
- Student is sullen and withdrawn, refusing overtures of friendship
- The student does not show remorse following behavior
- The behavior occurs after you take something away
- The behavior occurs after you require the student to do an unwanted activity.
- The student stops the behavior only when she wants
- Student expresses concerns about "fairness"
- Behavior is directed at person who is perceived as more "valued" by others

Self-Regulation

Possible Origins of Behavior:

- Has not learned alternative ways of coping
- Understimulated by environment
- Overstimulated by environment
- Student may be gifted, or experiencing a learning impairment, ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder)

Student Behavior:

- The behavior tends to happen over and over again

Attempts to Reduce Stimulation:

- The behavior occurs when there is a lot going on
- The student can do other things while doing the behavior
- The behavior tends to occur in stressful, anxiety producing or highly demanding situations

Attempts to Increase Stimulation:

- The behavior occurs when there is little going on
- The behavior occurs when the student seems bored
- The behavior seems to follow periods of non-activity (e.g., periods of seat work)

Play

Possible Origins of Behavior:

- Society expects children to play: "play is the work of children"
- Student is involved in routine, structured activities for long periods of time
- Lack of opportunities to interact with peers

Student Behavior:

- The behavior would occur when no one else was around
- The student seems to enjoy performing the behavior
- Student is sorry if someone gets hurt
- Student is reluctant to stop the behavior when asked to do so

Figure 4.2

COMMON FEELINGS AND IMPULSES OF PEOPLE WHO EXPERIENCE CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR

Attention

Others Reaction to Behavior:

- Feels irritated or annoyed
- The impulse is to say something

Revenge

Others Reaction to Behavior:

- Dislike, hurt, devastation in addition to anger, frustration, fear
- Fight or flight

Escape/Avoidance

Others Reaction to Behavior:

- Professional concern, prescriptive
- Resigned to failure
- Feels frustration (knows student could do better if he "just tried")

Self-Regulation

Others Reaction to Behavior:

- Frustrated /exasperated
- Irritation
- The impulse is to say something or redirect the student (e.g., get back to work, pay attention)

Control

Others Reaction to Behavior:

- Feels angry or frustrated
- Feels like you are losing control of the situation (power struggle)
- The impulse is to do something physical

Play

Others Reaction to Behavior:

- Feels helpless/ineffective
- Impulse is to say something

The final piece of information comes from *the student's history*, previously discussed by the team in determining factors which may impact upon the student's ability to meet basic needs or benefit from instruction. Do events in the student's life correspond to the onset of the challenging behavior? Does the team's hypothesis make sense in light of the student's history? For example, if the team thinks the student could be communicating a need for greater control, does the student's history indicate an excessive degree of control exerted on her by adults (e.g., physical or emotional abuse, frequent changes in residence, forced separation from parents or siblings)?

After using the discussion format to further verify the hypothesis on what need the behavior communicates the team may agree that there is no need for further verification before using it to develop a student support plan. However, if the team is still unsure about their hypothesis, observations can be used to further verify it.

Reflection Question

- Using the behavior identified for the previous reflection questions, attempt to determine if the behavior communicates a need for attention, avoidance/escape, to get something, revenge, self-regulation/coping and/or play.

How can a systematic direct observation format be used to further verify an hypothesis?

Admittedly, determining the goal(s) of a student's behavior is not an easy task. When one is the direct recipient of a challenging behavior, it is not easy to step back and gain a thoughtful perspective on the situation. For this reason, it is often helpful to have team members observe situations when the behavior does and does not occur to clarify the information you collected and to provide additional insights. Also, it can be useful to videotape the situations and provide support for students, their families and other team members to assess what needs the behaviors communicate.

There are several reasons for collecting additional information through observation: 1) to more accurately determine how frequently the behaviors occur; 2) to verify what is happening just before the behaviors occur; 3) to observe what actually happens after occurrences of the behaviors; and 4) to clarify the communication of the behavior. The information collected will help teams further verify what triggers behaviors and what needs they meet.

An antecedent-behavior-consequence (ABC) format can be used to collect information on behavior episodes. Behavior episodes consist of one or more behaviors which occur closely in time. For example, an episode could consist of one behavior; screaming, or two behaviors; screaming and running out of the room. To use the ABC format, a piece of paper is divided into three columns labeled antecedent, behavior and consequence. In the antecedent column the observer notes in detail what type of activity preceded each behavior episode (e.g., social studies, lunch, small group instruction), the nature of the activity (e.g., a demand, a difficult task, a transition) and who was involved. The behaviors and consequences are noted in the appropriate columns. Observers can also note their perception of the need the behavior(s) communicated. Once the observation data is collected, the team once again plays detective looking for patterns of events which precede and follow the behaviors to identify more specifically what sets off and does not set off the behaviors, and what the behaviors communicate.

How long should data be collected?

It will depend on how frequently the problematic situations occur. Infrequent behaviors will require more days of observation to determine patterns. An initial estimate of how long to observe should be based on the information collected during the initial assessment process. Teams should try to obtain observations of approximately 2 to 5 days, or until a minimum of 10 to 15 occurrences of challenging situations have been recorded.

Who should observe?

Each team should select at least one team member, or recruit volunteers, who can be released to spend 2 to 5 days observing. Observers should observe and not be responsible for dealing with the behaviors. It is important for observers to take time to familiarize themselves with the observation form and practice using it prior to collecting data.

When and where should observations be done?

Review the assessment information already collected to determine when and where the behaviors are *most* and *least likely* to occur. Students *should* be observed across a variety of settings and frequently throughout the day. It is very important to observe activities and circumstances when the problematic behavior *do* and *do not occur* to determine the nature of situations which do and do not precede the behaviors.

Preparation Activity

- Practice using the observation form at school, home or at your next staff meeting. Identify one person and the target behaviors to be observed.

After completing the assessment and observation process the team moves on to brainstorming positive support strategies to prevent the occurrence of challenging behavior, and to selecting and teaching replacement behaviors for students to appropriately express their needs. An abundance of information has been collected and teams report that having all the pertinent information available on one sheet of paper is helpful when devising a support plan. Figure 4.3 is a sample form that teams have used to summarize the assessment information they have collected.

Figure 4.3

SUMMARY OF ASSESSMENT INFORMATION

Student ____________________ Age______

Student Strengths

Important Relationships

Student Needs

Student and Family Goals

Difficult Behavior ***Its Communication***

Other Important Issues To Keep In Mind

Chapter 5

Identify Student Supports

Once the situations which trigger challenging behaviors and the purposes of the behaviors have been identified, planning teams can focus on brainstorming supports to prevent them. Support strategies are pro-active not reactive, and active not passive. They either minimize contact with people, places, activities or times that appear to precede the behaviors or change the situations. Preventing challenging behaviors from occurring is more effective then primarily focusing on how to respond after they occur because prevention strategies set-up both the student *and* teachers for success.

Are There Guidelines for Selecting Support Strategies?

Four general guidelines for selecting support strategies are:

1. Encourage students to have ownership and responsibility for making the strategies work through listening to them, involving them in brainstorming their support needs, and supporting them to approve and disapprove strategies;
2. Consider the functions of the challenging behaviors (i.e., attention, escape/avoidance, control/to get something, revenge, self-regulation and play) when selecting support strategies. Figure 5.1 provides information on positive aspects of the behaviors and Figure 5.2 provides considerations for developing a student support plan based upon the function of the behaviors;
3. Provide too much support rather than not enough; and
4. Initially make participation errorless by preventing problems from occurring until the student has mastered coping skills for dealing with these situations.

The factors which contribute to students presenting challenging behaviors are complex and a wide array of prevention options must be considered and used. In developing support plans teams should, at the minimum, consider options which:

- Increase student control and choices;
- Increase opportunities for positive attention;

66

Figure 5.1

POSITIVE ASPECTS OF BEHAVIOR

Attention - Student is interested in relationships with adults and peers. Student is asking for attention. Attention can be used to motivate positive behavior.

Control - Student exhibits leadership potential, assertiveness and independent thinking.

Revenge - Student shows a spark of life. May be trying to protect self from further hurt.

Escape / Avoidance - Student may want to succeed if he can be sure of not making mistakes and of achieving some status. For some severely discouraged students, there are few positives.

Self -Regulation - Behaviors may work to reduce anxiety.

Play - Student enjoys life. Is able to amuse himself. Wants friends.

Figure 5.2

CATEGORIES OF SUPPORTS WHICH SHOULD BE CONSIDERED FOR EACH COMMUNICATION OF BEHAVIOR

Attention / Control / Revenge

- Increase the student's personal control and choices.
- Increase opportunities for positive attention and friendships.
- Increase the students status, self esteem, image.

Escape/Avoidance / Play

- Increase the student's personal control and choices.
- Increase the students status, self esteem, image.
- Match teaching strategies to student strengths and interests.
- Match instructional activities and materials to student strengths and interests.
- Match expected responses/testing methods to student strengths and interests.

Self-Regulation

- Increase the student's personal control and choices.
- Match teaching strategies to student strengths and interests.
- Match instructional activities and materials to student strengths and interests.
- Match expected responses/testing methods to student strengths and interests.

- Increase student's status, self-esteem, image;
- Match teaching strategies to student strengths;
- Match instructional activities to student strengths;
- Match expected responses/testing methods to student strengths; and
- Match physical arrangement and classroom management to student strengths.

In Figure 5.3 we have listed support strategies for each of the above options. The intent was not to present an exhaustive list, but to assist teams in generating ideas.

Reflection Questions

1. Using the student identified for the previous reflection question review Figure 5.3, Support Strategies for Preventing Challenging Behavior, and select strategies which would help support the student.
2. Do you think that most of the strategies on the Support Strategies List will help support most students?

Developing support strategies should include efforts by the team to ensure that the student's quality of life is at least as good as the typical life circumstances of a student their same age. For example, Allison's support plan included ways to avoid situations that precede hitting others but it also addressed the fact that she is lonely and needs friends. The support strategies implemented by Allison's team included efforts to improve her social status and enable her to develop friendships.

Figure 5.3

SUPPORT STRATEGIES FOR PREVENTING PROBLEM BEHAVIOR

Increase Student Control and Choices

- Ask students what they need to have a better experience at school.
- Include students in planning and problem solving.
- Increase the number, variety and importance of the decisions students make.
- Support students having flexibility in their daily schedules.
- Support students shortening the length of an activity or taking mini-breaks.
- Grant students legitimate power — involve students in leadership roles.
- Support students to transition to the next class/activity at a different time.
- Add interesting activities and experiences matched to students' individual needs.
- Support students to self-evaluate their work.
- Support students to choose between various assignments or choose what part of an assignment to do.
- Support students to leave class when needed.
- Support students to choose testing methods.
- Develop assignments which emphasize students' choices, strengths and talents.

Increase Opportunities for Positive Attention

- Assign students to teacher advisor/mentors.
- Increase the number of friends or allies who know and spend time with students.
- Encourage other students to include the student in activities (e.g., develop a "Circle of Friends").
- Engage family, friends, faculty, students in supporting the students (e.g., implement a MAPS activity).
- Identify an adult mentor within the community.
- Increase the number of community activities students have access to.
- Support students to join after school groups/clubs/teams.
- Increase others' knowledge of students' interests strengths and preferences.
- Use teaching assistants to help all students in the class rather than an assistant paired directly with one student.
- Speak and react to students in ways that model respect and friendship.
- Develop a peer buddy systems for students.

Figure 5.3 Continued

Increase Student's Status, Self-Esteem, Image

- Support students to be peer mentors/tutors.
- Support student involvement in community service activities.
- Give students assignments which will "guarantee" success.
- Support students to obtain a job.
- Add prosocial skills to students' curricula.
- Support students to access high status materials, clothing accessories (in style for age group and community).
- If any characteristics of the students' life reinforce a negative reputation, try to decrease the stigma students experience.
- Give students high status classroom/school jobs/roles.
- Increase amount of time students spend in roles that offer the best opportunities to express their natural abilities or strong interests (e.g., drawing, music, drama, pottery, sports, reading, math).

Match Teaching Strategies /Arrangements to Meet the Student's Strengths

- Increase the use of hands on, small group, (3 to 6 students) teacher directed and student directed activities and decrease/limit large group (e.g., lecture format) activities.
- Increase the use of Cooperative Learning Group Activities.
- Provide students instruction & frequent feedback on how to work in a group.
- Select instructional group in advance and rearrange groupings often to insure good matches among students.
- Decrease the length of activities.
- Increase the use of activities in which students work independently.
- Increase the use of peer partner/tutoring teaching formats.
- Gain student attention prior to giving directions.
- Provide students with written notes/audio tapes of lectures and written directions.
- Increase the use of a questioning/discussion format.
- Increase repeating/rewording questions and answers.
- Insure that students know when activities will be finished and how much time they have between activities.
- Increase use of comprehension checks before going on to new topic.
- Increase use of teacher demonstration/modeling.

70

Figure 5.3 Continued

- Increase use of role playing, coaching and feedback.
- Increase opportunities for students to use computers.
- Increase the fun level of activities (e.g., use games, hands on activities, cartoons, humor).

Match Instructional Activities and Materials to Student Strengths

- Tailor materials to match students' abilities and interests.
- Increase use of "hands on" activities.
- Increase use of "real life" examples matched to student age and interests.
- Use materials and activities that students commonly have access to in home and community environments.
- Use a variety of materials and activities to teach important concepts.
- Start at a point where you know students will be successful and work from there.
- Provide a variety of books/articles/materials for each lesson and allow students to select a few.
- Emphasize cooperation among students and sharing of materials.
- Limit competition among students.
- Increase opportunities for problem solving.
- Provide students with pre-training on materials (e.g., content, vocabulary).
- Be predictable — establish a visual schedule for the class as a whole and for individual students (like a date book).

Match Expected Responses / Testing Methods to Student's Strengths

- Support students to communicate ideas and demonstrate learning in a variety of ways (art, music, dance, poetry, oral presentations).
- Avoid requiring students to respond in ways which are likely to produce extreme stress or anxiety (e.g., read aloud for a non-reader, essay exam for a poor writer).
- When anxiety producing situations (e.g., oral presentation, final exams) cannot be avoided, provide additional support tailored to the students needs.
- Provide extra practice in non-threatening, supportive situations.
- Read the test to students.
- Test students in private.

Figure 5.3 Continued

- Give students extra time to answer/complete tests.
- Test students on a subset of the material.
- Break the test into shorter segments given over a period of days.

Physical Arrangement and Classroom Management

- Sit students in a position in the classroom which will best meet their needs (e.g., near the front of the classroom, near the teacher, near the door, near a window, near a supportive peer, away from unsupportive peers).
- Arrange classroom to prevent problems from occurring, facilitate cooperative interactions, and the sharing of materials and ideas between students and adults.
- Support students to leave the classroom (e.g., on a mission to the office, run an errand, go to see the guidance counselor) when anxious, angry, or fearful.
- Limit the student access to peers or adults who tend to set them off.
- Model appropriate ways of interacting with students for peers and other adults.
- Make sure all materials are handy and set up in advance.
- Reassess classroom rules in relation to the students' strengths and needs.
- Reassess classroom discipline methods in relation to the students' strengths and needs.

How Can We Facilitate Students Supporting Each Other?

It cannot be assumed that students will be able to establish and maintain friendships on their own. Being physically present and having frequent social contact does not necessarily lead to mutually rewarding friendships. Schaffner and Buswell[10] list some helpful strategies for developing friendships gleaned from their work with students, families and teachers. They suggest that we:

- Present students in the most positive light;
- Watch the students to identify budding relationships and then encourage them;
- Model respect, understanding and interest in all students;
- Structure activities in which students feel free to talk about their feelings and relationships;
- Help build a support group for the student such as, a "Circle of Friends" (e.g., a network that allows for the genuine involvement of classmates in

a caring and supportive friendship with the student with challenging behaviors);

- Use cooperative learning groups for class activities; and
- Advocate for the inclusion of the student in extra-curricular clubs and high-status activities.

Are There Specific Approaches for Developing Friendships and Support?

What would make you happier? *"Happier? If I had more friends who cared about me. No matter what I do or how I act."*

Two approaches for developing friendships and support are "Circle of Friends"[11] and MAPS[12] (McGill Action Planning System).

What is a "Circle of Friends"?

Students with challenging behaviors often find themselves isolated and alone. They may have lots of contact with caring service providers but it's not the same as having a friend. Students know the difference between trying to fit in and belonging. As educators, we have a tendency to focus on academic accommodations, skill development and behavior interventions. We pay little attention to the one thing students say they need the most. They need *friends* and they need to feel like they *belong.*

Snow and Forest have developed a process called "Circles of Friends" to help students build relationships with their classmates. This process is an activity that is done with a teacher or facilitator and the student's classmates. It helps to familiarize the student's classmates with how the student with challenging behavior feels, and what her life is like in relation to their own. In addition it helps the teacher or facilitator identify classmates who would be most willing to spend time with the student. This process is strictly voluntary, and classmates do not earn credits for being a friend. Hopefully the outcome of this process is development of genuine caring and supportive friendships between the student and their classmates.

How do we get started?

Start by drawing four concentric circles on a black board or large piece of paper for the students to see. A typical script (adapted from Snow & Forrest) one may use with the student's classmates goes as follows:

1. Hi, we are going to talk today about *(student)* who is going to be a student in your class (is a student in your class).
2. To tell you the truth, we can all feel a little scared sometimes when someone new comes to the class (when someone different is in the class). Why do you think ______________ may be scared?

73

Have the students discuss reasons for being scared

3. I want to take a few minutes to do an activity with you called circle of friends. There are four circles. On each circle you are to list people you know. The first, small, inner circle is for you to write your family and closest friends. (Teacher/facilitator fills in her circle on large paper).
4. Would some of you like to share who you put in your inner circle? (If no response, the teacher can share her first circle).
5. Okay, the second circle (the one bordering the inner circle) is for your friends, they are good friends yet you wouldn't put them in your inner circle number.
6. Share circle number two.
7. The third circle is for acquaintances. These are people you spend some time with like in scouting, soccer, club, or kids on your street.
8. Share circle number three.
9. In our fourth circle (the outer circle) we put people you or your parents pay to be in your lives, like the person who cuts your hair or your doctor.
10. Share circles.
11. Now I want you to think of an imaginary student named Rudi. She's your age and her circles look like this; she has her mom in circle number 1 and circles 2 and 3 are empty. Circle number 4 is filled with two respite workers, one therapist, one social worker and a doctor. How would you feel if your circle looked like Rudy's?

Have the student's talk about how they would feel

12. How can we make sure that _________'s circle doesn't look like Rudi's? (Let class brainstorm ideas). Who would like to be in ______________'s circle of friends?
13. Now remember that being friends isn't always easy and sometimes it can be really hard. Not all of you will be ______________'s friend yet each of you can do your best to be friendly with _____________.

Once a circle has been established for a student, it is important for the circle to meet on a regular basis as a circle team (i.e., have lunch together, meet before/after school or meet together outside during recess at a private spot). The teacher can help problem solve activities for the students to do together and process any issues that come up for the group. It doesn't blossom over night and may take some time for students to truly become friends and require less assistance through structured meetings.

What is MAPS?

The MAPS[13] process is a method of planning that is very individualized and strength based. This process is an approach to help teams think about who students are, where they want to go, what they are good at, and what they need. It helps to generate ideas for supporting students to belong.

The MAPS process typically involves the student support team and the student's friends. Together they address seven key questions. For each question, individuals take turns answering until all possible avenues of the question have been exhausted. The end result is a "snap-shot" of students and strategies for supporting their needs. The questions include:

1. What is the student's history? (e.g., key milestones in the student's life, past educational experiences, etc.)
2. What is your dream for this student? (e.g., type of classes, what she will do after graduation, job, marriage, kids, etc.)
3. What is your worst nightmare for the student? (e.g., this presents a worst case scenario that the team can work to prevent.)
4. Who is this student? (e.g., brainstorm words to describe the student, once the list is completed, three words are chosen that best describe the student.)
5. What are the student's strengths, gifts and talents? (e.g., good with hands, funny, likes to read, understanding, street smart, etc.)
6. What are the student's needs? (e.g., emotional needs, physical needs, social needs, academic needs, etc.)
7. What would this student's ideal day at school look like? What do we need to do to make this happen? (e.g., generate a plan for supports and accommodations needed to help this student go through a typical day).

After a team has developed a MAP for the student, they need to start on their journey. Just like any other map, sometimes we don't see the hidden turns or anticipate the sudden changes in the pavement. Continue to persevere and together you will find your way.

Can the Way in Which the Teacher Communicates with Students Provide Support?

Yes. The way in which a teacher communicates with students can avoid or provoke conflict. Three forms of interaction that can prevent conflict from occurring and can help de-escalate it after it has occurred are the use of *I-messages*, Interpretive Feedback, and Quiet Messages.

What are *I-messages*?

I-messages enable teachers to communicate how they feel about a specific situation without placing the blame on the students. The intent of a simple, straightforward *I-message* is not to tell another person what do, but to communicate the impact of their actions.

You-messages do the opposite of the *I-messages*. *You-messages* assign blame to the person. This type of communication tends to order, preach and command students. In addition, this type of message may lead to ridicule and shame, provoking a student to become defensive, withdrawn, or escalate the intensity of the episode.

Typical "I-messages"	Typical "You-messages"
I feel angry when...	You stop that...
When students talk during class I...	You should know better.
What can I do about this?	You are bugging me.
It makes me feel good when...	You sit down.

What is interpretive feedback?

Interpretive feedback involves addressing what people are feeling as well as what they are saying. Use of interpretive feedback communicates that you care about the person and how they feel. Often acknowledging and talking about the feelings can avoid or defuse potentially troublesome situations.

In order to use interpretive feedback you must first determine how the person is feeling (e.g., angry, afraid, anxious, frustrated) based on their tone of voice, body language and the context of the situation. Next, acknowledge the feeling (e.g., "Mary, it seems that you are frustrated") and indicate that you understand why they feel that way (e.g., "Division problems can be very trying. Following all the steps and writing down the numbers in the right place can be a very hard thing to do"). If you are not sure how a person is feeling, venture a guess (e.g., "You seem angry") and ask questions to enable the student to process the situation (e.g., "Did something bad happen to you this morning").

What are *quiet-messages*?

Quiet-messages are ways to communicate with students without publicly singling them out for such things as mistakes, rule violations, and inappropriate behavior. No one likes to be singled out for such transgressions. For example, at a teachers' meeting your supervisor tells you to put your gum away or reprimands you for not completing a committee assignment. In the packed teachers' lounge your supervisor asks for an explanation of why you have been 10 minutes late for work every day for the past week. How would you feel? Would you feel embarrassed, angry, that a trust with your supervisor had been violated, that your supervisor was disrespectful and ignoring your need for privacy? How would you prefer that the supervisor communicate with you?

Students have similar reactions to being publicly singled out for transgressions. However, we often observe students being singled out. Blatant examples include writing students' names on the board for misbehaving and posting student grades along side their names. Less blatant examples include telling students, in front of the whole class, to get to work, to take the gum out of their mouths, or the consequences for not completing her homework. Some ways to avoid singling students for transgressions include:

- Take the student aside for a private conference;
- Use verbal reminders which do not single out a particular student such as, reminding the whole class about their homework, asking the student if she needs help rather then singling her out for being off task, reminding the whole class about gum chewing rule; and
- Use nonverbal cues such as pointing to your mouth to remind the student about gum chewing, point towards the student's work to remind her of what she is supposed to be doing, hand the student an object related to the activity you want them to do, use a questioning body posture and facial express to ask the student if she intends to do her homework.

Refining communication skills is complicated due to the patterns of interacting we have established over the years. Using new communication skills is further complicated by the emotional intensity that accompanies challenging interactions. Be kind, realistic and understanding when self-evaluating how quickly you can change your interaction skills and types of support you need to make the change.

Exercise

1. Generate a list of *You-messages* and then rewrite them as *I-messages.*
2. Practice using *I-messages* with your spouse and children.
3. Think of examples when you or someone else has used interpretive feedback.
4. Practice using interpretive feedback with your spouse and children.
5. Think of examples when you or someone else have used *quiet-messages.*
6. Practice using quiet messages with your spouse and children.

Are There Teaching Styles Which Support Preventing Challenging Behavior?

Frequently when teams discuss how to prevent challenging behavior, we hear, "We need to set limits." However, the effect created by setting limits is dramatically influenced by a person's individual *teaching style.* The term *teaching style* refers to the set of attitudes and beliefs that define and direct how a teacher acts. There are at least four *teaching styles* that influence how adults support students; permissive, authoritarian, apathetic and democratic. Most teachers will employ a mixture of styles, however they will tend to use one style more often. A teaching style which is predominantly democratic is usually the most effective in addressing challenging behavior.

Permissive. This style provides total freedom for the student. The adult tends to be overprotective and there are few if any guidelines. The adult expresses a desire to care but there is a lack of clear expectations. The adult wants to maintain the status quo, avoids conflict by giving in, and generally tries to "win" the student's approval. When teachers or family members use this style, group members tend to take advantage of each other. Students who are responded to in this style often have difficulty dealing with rules and regulations.

Authoritarian. This style allows for no freedom on the part of the student. Control of the difficult behavior is gained through the use of rigid rules and punitive and/or reinforcing consequences. With this style the powerful govern the powerless and the student learns to be dependent on the teacher for control. For example, when the teacher is not present, the student has a tendency to resist being controlled and "acts out." In addition, the student expects "pay" for cooperation and if there is no follow-through the student becomes increasingly resentful and seeks revenge. The authoritarian style also models dominating others as the way to solve problems.

Apathetic. This style allows for the adult to avoid attachment and ownership of students. The adult tends to use guidelines for controlling behavior with little concern for their effectiveness with individual students. The adult steps back and watches as students experience failure without any support. The effect of this non-interactive style is that students can perceive the adult as cold/distancing/detached. This usually results in the student seeking trust and belonging from someone else.

Democratic. This style allows for the student to experience freedom within limits. This style is based on a desire to give and receive affection, a need for fairness and a desire to empower. There is an emphasis on unconditional acceptance of the student and mutual respect. In addition, a democratic style of setting limits for behavior permits choice but requires accountability. The teacher controls situations by

78

defining *the parameters of what is acceptable*, not students. *This style enables students to learn how to make decisions. Sharing decision making enables all parties to get their needs met and feel ownership of the plan. The resulting relationship is based on friendship, growth and a focus on interdependence.*

How Does a Teacher Who Uses a Democratic Teaching Style Respond to Challenging Behavior?

One type of response strategy that supports a democratic teaching style is logical consequences. Logical consequences involves the teacher negotiating with students to identify a logical consequence *before* a situation arises. For example, if students continues to play a game during reading period, then the students do their reading while other students have free time; or if students hit a peer, they might apologize *and* make it up to the person by doing a favor. Some characteristics of logical consequences include:

- The dignity of all those involved is the first consideration;
- The consequence should "makes sense" and be logically connected to the student's behavior;
- The consequence teaches the student what to do the next time a similar situation occurs;
- Teachers respond only to the present situation, not a build up of past events;
- Teachers are respectful and follow through; and
- The consequences permit choice and stress accountability for both students and teachers.

Reflection Questions

1. If you were a student, what teaching style would you find most supportive? Why?
2. Which style best describes your style?
3. Should teachers be asked to change their predominate teaching style to more effectively support students?
4. What supports should teachers be given in evaluating and changing their styles?

Working together the team should be able to provide support to enhance the student's overall quality of life and to prevent problems from occurring. The next step is for the team to identify what replacement behaviors to teach and how to teach them.

Chapter 6

Select and Teach Replacement Behavior

What are Replacement Behaviors?

In Chapter 5, we discussed support strategies to prevent problems from occurring by minimizing the student's exposure to stressful or provocative events. However, it is generally not possible for a student to completely avoid stressful situations. Thus, the student needs to learn appropriate ways to cope with stressful situations. To illustrate, here are some examples of replacement behavior:

- Allison learned to ask for a hug from her teachers and peers instead of roughhousing with them whenever she needed attention.
- Joseph learned to take a "pass" from the teacher's desk and go visit another adult (principle, nurse, janitor) whenever he felt anxious. The pass is signed by his teacher and the other supportive adult to insure accountability.
- Malcolm learned to ask for help from a peer partner when he felt he couldn't do a problem.

What are Some Guidelines for Selecting Replacement Behavior?

Replacement behaviors should always be selected through student, family and educators input and practiced with all people involved. Remember that students are engaging in challenging behavior to meet specific needs (e.g., to get attention, relieve anxiety, avoid a difficult task) and that challenging behavior may be the best way they have for meeting these needs. If our goal is to teach students other ways to effectively meet their needs, then we must select replacement behaviors that can serve the same purpose as the challenging behavior.

When selecting replacement behaviors, the team should address the following questions:

Will the replacement behavior ...

...work as well as the problem behavior in meeting students' needs?

...be an acceptable alternative to the problem behavior?

...be something that students choose to do and their families and teachers support?

...help build a positive reputation for students?

A replacement behavior can be a new behavior or a behavior the student already performs (but does not use on a regular basis). For example, Allison knew how to ask for a hug but she did not ask for one consistently. By encouraging and rewarding Allison to ask for a hug, Allison's teachers were able to teach an acceptable alternative to hitting. Whereas with Joseph, the team introduced a new way of coping. They taught Joseph to pick up a pass from the teacher's desk and leave the room when he felt anxious.

What are Some Strategies for Teaching Replacement Behavior?

There are a number of strategies for teaching replacement behavior. Once your team chooses a replacement behavior, consider the following tips and ideas for teaching it.

- Identify what the student has learned during the past year and find out what teaching strategies and assistance were most effective.
- In the beginning, practice the new behavior when the student is calm, relaxed and at times when problems do not occur.
- Provide multiple opportunities for the student to role-play and practice using the new behavior (i.e., in different classes, recess, home).
- In addition to teaching the student *how* to perform the new behavior, teach *when* to use it.
- To teach the student to self-initiate performing the skill, use such procedures as role playing and practice with feedback in the natural environment. Teach the student to recognize the specific situational and internal cues (e.g., student feels his heart pounding just before his turn to read aloud) that naturally happen before the behavior should occur. Overall, minimize the use of teacher-related cues because they foster dependency on the teacher.
- Try to anticipate when the student is about to make a mistake (experience difficulty when initially learning a new coping skill) and provide support to insure success, *but* allow enough time for the student to self-initiate participating. Ask the student what they want you to *do* (nonverbal cues) or *say* (verbal cues) to cue them to practice the new skill.
- Recognize that we all need different levels of support at different times. Be willing to increase or decrease the level of support based on the moment-to-moment needs of the student.

Teams should summarize what replacement behaviors they choose, how the replacement behaviors meets the student's needs (how it is directly related to the communication of the student's behavior), and how they will be taught. All components become part of the student's support plan.

Reflection Question

- Using the student identified for the previous reflection questions select replacement behavior(s) for the challenging behavior.

Are There Other Skills Which Should Be Addressed?

In addition to teaching replacement behaviors which specifically address the communication of students' challenging behaviors, teams may identify other skills to teach which enhance students' abilities to cope with difficult situations. Skills that enhance students' abilities to cope and survive in the classroom are often referred to as prosocial skills. In general students should learn how to use problem-focused coping skills to change situations that are controllable and emotion-focused coping skills to manage negative emotions when they have little or no control over a stressful situation. As depicted in Figure 6.1, some specific prosocial skills to consider teaching students are: 1) non-verbal communication/ body language, 2) social relationships, 3) self-management, and 4) study skills. Often such skill areas are not formally covered within the school's curriculum, yet they are skills that benefit all students. Select skill areas based on students' needs and preferences. Always explain to students how a particular skill is directly related to enhancing their ability to cope with difficult situations and involve them in selecting the skills to be taught.

Example strategies for teaching prosocial skills

- Read and discuss with the class stories about social situations (e.g., teasing) and how to respond to them.
- Provide opportunities for students to serve as peer sponsors with responsibility for supporting other, usually younger students, in responding appropriately to challenging social situations.
- Provide opportunities for students to write/tell/draw/act out stories about responding to challenging social situations (i.e., bullying, scape goating) based upon their observations and to read/discuss them with the class.
- Invite small groups of students to lunch chats about challenging social situations on a frequent basis.
- Ask students to keep a journal about resolving conflicts. Begin with a starter story about a difficult time and how you resolved it. Encourage students to write/tell and discuss their own experiences. Provide them with starter phases such as, "I find it hard to..." or "I had a hard time when...."

Figure 6.1

EXAMPLE OF ADDITIONAL SKILL AREAS TO BE TAUGHT

Non-Verbal Communication/Body Language

Skill Areas: show preferences, indicate rejection/protest through head shake and facial expressions, indicate acceptance through head nod and facial expressions, makes eye contact, use appropriate facial expressions, use appropriate body postures, use welcoming gestures, keep interpersonal distance, maintain physical appearance, limit physical contact.

Social Relationships

Skill Areas: introduce yourself, introduce other people, begin a conversation, end a conversation, join in, play a game, ask a favor, participate in turn taking, participation, offer assistance, salutations, ask a question, give a compliment, take a compliment, cooperate, share, apologize, negotiate, stand up for rights, treat others with respect, follow rules/social routines, act appropriately towards opposite sex, accept no, say no, ask permission.

Self Management

Skill Areas: know feelings, express feelings, recognize another's feelings, express concern for another, express affection, deal with anger, deal with another's anger, deal with fear, use self control, respond to teasing, deal with losing, deal with failure, avoid trouble, stay out of fights, accept consequences, deal with group pressure, deal with contradictory messages, relax, be honest, set goals, make decisions, solve problems, follow personal schedule , create schedule.

Study Skills

Skill Areas: listen, ask for help, ask questions, work/study habits, bring materials to class, follow instructions, take notes, organize materials/assignments, time management, complete assignments, ignore distractions, set goals, make choices, come to class on time, work in small groups (student directed), work in cooperative groups, work independently, tutor others, accept tutoring, use computers, follow classroom rules.

- Ask students to write/tell about their feelings. Begin with a starter story about situations which made you happy, lonely, mad, etc. Encourage students to write and discuss their own experiences. Provide them with starter phases such as, "I am happiest when..." or "I am loneliest when...."
- Use discussions, modeling, role playing and practice with feedback to teach substituting positive self-talk for negative self-talk. Encourage students to practice the skill in natural situations.
- Use discussions, modeling, role playing and practice with feedback to teach a consistent conflict management approach. Encourage students to practice the skill in natural situations.
- Use discussions, modeling, role playing and practice with feedback to teach "safety behavior" (e.g., responding to harassment). Encourage students to practice the skill in natural situations.
- Provide opportunities for students to participate in self-advocacy or self-help groups. Establish a "think tank" to help students solve problems.
- Acknowledge the feelings of students under stress and encourage students to talk about them.
- Assist students to identify the causes of major stress and strategies to reduce the stress (e.g., drop a class, get tutoring, change a teacher, leave the room to calm down).
- Have students be on "mediation" committees to learn conflict resolution skills and serve as a playground "mediator".
- Support students leaving activities causing major stress until they calm down (e.g., establish hand signals students use to indicate they are leaving and/or that you use to cue students to leave).
- Assist students to assess the rationality of their beliefs about how others are thinking about or acting towards them. For example, after an activity identify interactions such as a student laughing, a student asking clarification questions of another student, a student offering to help another student, and a student disagreeing with another's response. Ask students to individually identify why the student was laughing, etc. Next have students ask the target student "Why were you laughing?" Support students to compare their beliefs with the beliefs of other students and the student who performed the behavior in question.

Reflection Question

- Using the student identified for the previous reflectionquestions select additional prosocial skills to teach the student for coping with difficult situations.

Are There Specific Approaches for Teaching Prosocial Skills?

Perhaps the most common approach to teaching new skills is one in which students rely on others to direct their behavior. As described in Chapter 1, *teachers* are taught how to change behaviors through such procedures as, establishment of clear rules and consequences for appropriate and inappropriate behaviors. However, sole emphasis on teacher directed procedures can make students overly dependent on teacher interventions to manage their behavior. Our goal is to teach students better ways to cope with unavoidable stress and how to establish and maintain positive relationships *by regulating their own behavior*.

Strategies to teach students to manage their own behavior have various labels depending upon the context in which they are being used or studied. Strategies to teach students how to manage and evaluate themselves around a wide variety of academic tasks may focus on areas such as, organizing themselves for learning, managing their time, studying, writing a theme, reading for comprehension and spelling. Teaching students to self-regulate their behavior in a wide variety of social situations may include responding to teasing, negotiating, reacting to failure, avoiding trouble and, staying out of fights. Self-regulation strategies have also been used to address emotions, such as anger and frustration. For example, when students are faced with situations in which they are accused of something, teased, embarrassed, or frustrated, they may have an emotional reaction which makes it difficult or impossible for them to handle the situation in appropriate manner. Students can be taught to use a variety of techniques, depending on the situation, to deal with their emotions such as, leave the room until they calm down, count to ten before responding, do a relaxation exercise.

Some advantages of teaching students to regulate their own behavior are:

- It involves students actively participating in the development of their programs, encouraging them to take responsibility for their own behavior.
- The approach is proactive rather then reactive. That is, it teaches students skills that can be used to prevent challenging behaviors from occurring.
- It can produce more enduring changes in students' behaviors. That is, students may manage their behavior even when interventions have been removed and there are no teachers present to supervise.

What are Some Common Strategies Used to Teach Students to Regulate Their Own Behavior?

Teaching students to regulate their own behavior requires more than just breaking down a social skill and role playing the steps. Wood and Long[14] describe self-regulation as emerging from a student being able to understand an event, being motivated to change, and trusting in adults. Understanding an event includes recalling and sequencing what happened, acknowledging their actions and feelings and recognizing how others are reacting. Acquiring the motivation to change includes believing that a situation can change for the better, having sufficient self-esteem to recognize that they deserve something better and having the confidence to try to change. Trust in adults is established and built on a student's experience with adults who respect their feelings, value them, focus on their strengths, and use power wisely. These are some of the essential components of creating a social context for empowering students to assume responsibility for managing their own behavior, controlling their impulses to act on their emotions, adhering to social norms, and developing positive relationships.

The following is a brief description of strategies that enable students to develop self-control:

Self-monitoring teaches students to keep track of their feelings, thoughts and behavior. A student may also be required to make a judgment about the quality of their thoughts or behavior. A self-monitoring checklist may include questions such as:

- What happened?
- How were you feeling?
- What positive or negative comments did you tell yourself *before* you acted?
- Were there positive or negative reactions from others?
- What did you tell yourself about how you acted?
- What positive or negative comments did you tell yourself *after* you acted?

Self-instruction teaches students to talk to themselves (think) before, during and after they act. Through self-instruction students can learn to prompt themselves to calm down, talk themselves through the steps of a procedure to control anger, use problem solving routines to come up with a plan of action to resolve a conflict, respond to teasing, problem solve, organize their school work, study for an exam, or write a theme. The following is an example of a six-step procedure used by Weissberg[15] to teach students to solve problems:

- Stop, tell yourself to calm down and think before you act.
- Say what the problem is and how you feel.
- Set a positive goal.
- Think of many solutions.
- Think ahead to what might happen.
- Act out your best choice.

Self-reward teaches students to give themselves positive feedback for how they are acting. Although it is important for all of us to seek out and receive appreciation from others it is equally important to avoid exclusively depending on others to reward our behavior. The steps for rewarding oneself are to recognize that you did a good job, tell yourself "nice going" and do something that you enjoy.

Procedures for teaching self-monitoring, self-instruction, and self-reward usually include some combination of the following.

- **Modeling.** The teacher and other students model using a strategy aloud around targeted situations (e.g., completing assignments, expressing feelings, dealing with anger, staying out of fights, writing a theme).
- **Role Playing.** The teacher and students role play using a strategy to focus on targeted situations.
- **Coaching in Naturally Occurring Situations.** Adults and peers provide prompting and feedback on the use of a strategy in naturally occurring situations.

Are There Prosocial Skills Curriculum Which Address Teaching Students to Manage and Evaluate Themselves?

There are a many programs available for teaching social skills and a few are listed below. The list is not intended to be exhaustive nor to indicate the best ones for your situation. If you are interested in using a curriculum, you should become familiar with several and use the one which best meets your needs along such dimensions as, what social skills it covers, the procedures used to teach the skills and the strategies it employs to insure that students maintain the skills and use them in natural environments. Many social skills curriculums will assist you in selecting what skills to teach and designing lessons. However it is important to integrate the social skills you are teaching into everyday classroom routines. By creating multiple opportunities to practice prosocial skills throughout the day and across environments it will increase the flexible use of these strategies (adults and children role models how to adapt skills to meet the demands of a variety of real-life situations) and increase frequency of positive and specific feedback for using these skills. Typically, social skills curricula teach skills through modeling, role playing and performance feedback.

- Skillstreaming the Elementary School Child (McGinnis & Goldstein, 1984. Champaign, IL: Research Press).
- Skillstreaming the Adolescent (Goldstein, Sprafkin, Gershaw, & Klein, 1980. Champaign, IL: Research Press).
- Systematic Instruction of Social Skills (Sargent, 1988. Iowa Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education, Grimes State Office Building, Des Moines, IA).

87

- The Walker Social Skills Curriculum: The Accepts Program (Walker, McConnel, Holmes, Todis, Walker, & Golden, 1983. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed).
- The Access Program (Walker, Todis, Holmes, & Horton, 1988. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed).
- Getting Along with Others: Teaching Social Effectiveness to Children (Jackson, Jackson, & Monroe, 1983. Champaign, IL: Research Press).
- The Yale-New Haven Social Problem Solving Project (Weissberg, Caplan, & Bennetto, 1988).
- Comprehensive Stress Management Program For Children (Ledoux 1985).
- Teaching Children to be Peacemakers (Johnson & Johnson, 1991).

Students have had a lot of practice using the challenging behaviors and the behaviors meet their needs. Teaching replacement behaviors will take time. In spite of our best efforts to provide support that prevents the behaviors, they are going to occur until the replacement behaviors are learned. The next step in developing a student support plan is to decide how to respond to the challenging behavior in a manner that is helpful and respectful.

Chapter 7

Responding to Challenging Behavior

Introduction

Our approach to responding is based on how we, the adults in the student's life, modify our reactions or responses to be helpful and respectful to the student who is experiencing difficult times. Plans on how to respond when challenging behaviors occur should always be developed with the student, the student's family and all involved school staff. If a school administrator has a disciplinary role with the student, it is extremely important to have them help develop the plan as well. Once the plan is developed, like any new skill, involved staff and the student need to practice it. Keep in mind though, a response plan should not exist without strategies for prevention and teaching more acceptable replacement behavior.

Sometimes strategies used to *prevent* challenging behavior can be used as a method to defuse an incident. Four prevention strategies described in Chapter 5 that can be used in this way are: I- Messages, Interpretive Feedback, Quiet Messages, and use of a Democratic Teaching Style. An I-Message can help defuse the situation because feelings are communicated without blaming the student. Interpretive Feedback defuses situations because it communicates that you care about the person and how they feel. Quiet messages defuse incidents because what you need to communicate is done without singling out the student. Finally, use of a Democratic Teaching Style can defuse an incident by allowing the student choices but requiring accountability.

When responding to challenging behaviors, our goal is to be respectful, to calm the situation down, to encourage the student to turn the situation around, and to focus the student on appropriate behavior. Our ability to respond in these ways depends on the intensity of the behavior, the amount of support we have from others at the time of the incident, our own experience and training in dealing with challenging behaviors, and the school's disciplinary procedures.

How Do Emotions and Anxiety Affect Responding to Challenging Behavior?

Dealing with conflict is complicated due to the intensity of students' and teachers' emotions and their anxiety from past experiences with resolving conflict. The situation is influenced by the student's established way of dealing with challenges and the teacher's established patterns of interacting during a conflict. It is important to recognize how embarrassing it can be for both the teacher and student to publicly deal with a conflict. Our experience has taught us that educating teachers on how to respond to challenging situations is best accomplished through demonstrations and coaching them through challenging situations. Reading a chapter or attending a workshop on strategies for responding to challenging behavior falls far short of the necessary education to safely and effectively select and implement appropriate strategies during a time of conflict.

How Do School Discipline Policies Impact On Selecting Effective Responding Strategies?

The situation is further complicated by the methods of discipline used in the school and the immediate social influence from the people who surround the teacher and student. All too frequently a school's discipline system prescribes a few simple responses, (e.g., time-out in the classroom, loss of recess, phone call to the parent, sent to the office, detention, suspension) as answers to all difficult behaviors, regardless of the complexity of each situation. The assumption is that children will stop and think next time and choose to "behave" in order to avoid being punished. Relying exclusively on punitive consequences to change behavior may be effective in changing typical behavior problems but it frequently fails to help students with emotional problems. For example, early in the school year Malcolm was walking out of his classes whenever he couldn't control his anxiety. When his teachers punished him for leaving the class, he subsequently stayed in class when feeling anxious and his behaviors escalated and got totally out of control.

In addition, applying the same response across the board for a certain rule violation will often have the opposite effect from the one desired. For example, if a student rips a book to escape working and you respond by requiring the student to go to time-out for destroying school property, you may have just reinforced the behavior of ripping up the book. The student has experienced exactly what they wanted—to get out of doing their work. For a response to be effective it needs to be logically connected to the *communication* of the student's behavior which requires discipline procedures that have some flexibility.

Responding to Challenging Behavior

Teams should begin by reviewing how people are currently responding to challenging behavior and questioning whether their responses are appropriate and effective. First team members should analyze specific incidents objectively describing what happens and how they respond.

For example:

Setting Events	Student's Behavior	Teacher's Response
It was gym class; Allison was following directions but taking longer to do so as class progressed; teacher asked all students to join in a circle; Allison hesitated; teacher asked Allison to join the circle by the count of three	*Allison paused; started towards the circle then ran to the top of the bleachers*	*teacher reprimanded Allison and told her to come down*

For each incident determine the intent of the teacher's response (e.g., to stop Allison's behavior, to provide logical consequences). Next, teams need to reflect on what outcomes actually are accomplished (e.g., Allison's behavior escalated, her peers laughed). A crucial step is to then contrast and compare the actual outcomes of a response (e.g., Allison's peers laughing) with the communicative intent of the behavior (e.g., Allison needed attention and/or Allison was avoiding the task because she was tired). This typically generates a brainstorming session on effective response strategies that may effect, not hinder change. Teams then summarize how they plan to respond to challenging behavior in the future and what the purposes of their responses are (e.g., to calm the immediate situation, to teach a new behavior, to maintain a relationship with the student).

Caution! These guidelines are intended to help teams problem-solve ways to calm an intense moment. They do not begin to address buffering and protecting a student from excessive stress and teaching them to cope successfully with daily pressures. Sometimes teams focus too much on specific incidents and forget to address the overall stresses in a student's life which may be triggering relatively minor incidents.

When faced with a stressful situation, there are strategies that can increase the likelihood of positive outcomes. As mentioned, these strategies, like all teaching strategies, are influenced by the teacher's attitude towards the student. Refining our ability to deal with challenging situations begins with honestly examining our own thoughts and feelings about the student. The same strategy may look radically different when implemented by the many different people in the student's life. For example, one teacher may verbally redirect a student back to task in a humorous way and another may state a cold, curt demand. The following sections offer guidelines for determining effective ways of responding. The guidelines are categorized as:

- Neutralizing or momentarily calming the situation;
- Refocusing the student's attention on what you want them to do;

- Immediately providing encouragement for any effort the student makes to turn the situation around; and
- Responding to students when they are completely out of control.

Reflection Question

- We will describe each of the above categories in detail but first take time to reflect on past or current times of crisis in your own life or the life of someone close to you and identify what was respectful and helpful.

How Can a Situation Be Neutralized or Calmed?

Figure 7.1 provides guidelines for neutralizing or calming a challenging situation. Our goal is to decrease a student's emotional intensity while conveying that we are there to support the student and to understand why they are having a hard time. Adults who are successful at supporting a student through a crisis are seen by the student as unconditionally caring, trustworthy, able to protect them from harm and humiliation, confident that the student can cope with excessive stress, and confident that the future will be better.

Always take time following a challenging situation to identify what triggered the incident and what early signals were displayed by the student to indicate that they were stressed and about to have a difficult time. Incorporate anything new that you learned into the plan and adjust your support strategies to prevent problems from occurring the next time a similar situation happens.

How Can Students Be Refocused?

Figure 7.2 provides tips on creating an alternative focus for students during a difficult situation. Once the situation has momentarily calmed down, you as the teacher are responsible for presenting options that a student views to be fair and is willing to go along with. This may be very difficult to do because your natural tendency may be to focus on stopping the difficult behavior. Unfortunately, focusing on the problem often gives it power and importance. Your response should model what you want the student to do instead.

Throughout an incident the teacher is responsible for listening to the verbal and nonverbal messages offered by the student. These messages should serve as your guide for determining what level of participation is fair to require at any teaching moment.

Figure 7.1

TIPS ON NEUTRALIZING OR MOMENTARILY CALMING THE IMMEDIATE SITUATION

- Think about what message you are communicating by:
    - your position and proximity to the student (e.g., avoid being a threat, avoid chasing, avoid getting hurt, keep the student safe);
    - how quickly or slowly you are talking and moving;
    - your tone of voice;
    - the intensity of your response (e. g., if the student is loud then you need to be calm and quiet).
- Try not to focus on the struggle, think about what you want the student to do instead (ideally what the interaction should look like).
- Provide a fair and logical option to calm the moment. What can you and the student do to neutralize the situation. Take into consideration that the student may be scared, confused, embarrassed and may need to "save face".
- Before making a request, ask yourself "Am I willing to bet my paycheck on the student following my request?" If the answer is "no" think of something else to do.
- One way to minimize focusing on the "problem behavior" is, whenever possible, to continue to follow the natural flow of the day.
- When safety is an issue, interrupt the behavior to avoid injury, supporting not punishing the person.
- Remember that there is a qualitative difference between ignoring a person's behavior and ignoring a person. Find a way to minimize attention given to a behavior and continue to offer support.
- If necessary, adjust the environment to prevent things from getting worse.
- If you think that your response is making things worse, stop and re-evaluate.
- Others should continue with their regular day — if you need help, tell others what they should do. If another teacher is dealing with a difficult situation refrain from intervening unless asked to do so.

Adapted from Hobbs[16]

Figure 7.2

TIPS ON REFOCUSING THE STUDENT'S ATTENTION ON WHAT YOU WANT THEM TO DO

- Try to be subtle, present the alternative activity as if it were part of the regular scheme of things (e.g., ask the student to deliver something to another room).
- Think about times when you have been involved in a conflict and reached a point where you decided to "give up" and go along with the other person's point of view. Think about how difficult it is to do what the other person is requesting. In this regard, when a student has stopped struggling and is starting to "come around" make participation extremely easy and be willing to accept low levels of participation.
- Avoid over-prompting. Provide the necessary information, clearly and concisely without annoying the student (e. g., avoid nagging), use subtle, nonverbal cues.
- Be creative when generating options for engaging the student. Use your sense of humor—sometimes you can motivate a student to begin to participate by sharing rewards or engaging in a conversation. Your vehicle for participation does not have to be a task or activity.
- Initially, you are responsible for leading the interaction and insuring for fairness. Once tensions fade, allow the student to help direct the activity by incorporating "A or B" choices regarding when, where, how or with whom to interact.
- Present options in ways that match the student's learning style.
- Take frequent "mini" breaks to insure that the activity does not become too demanding.
- Avoid stating requests in a way that the student views as demanding or tense.
- Provide very specific closure cues—during difficult times we all need to know when the ordeal will be over.
- Use the activity as a vehicle to engage the student — avoid turning the activity into yet another "roadblock".
- If you need to move the person to a different room, take the time to get them engaged in an activity first, then initiate moving as part of the activity.
- Be creative. Use all available options for participating, including asking the student to instruct you on how to participate.
- Once the difficult moment has subsided, take care to avoid decreasing support too quickly. This may prompt another incident.
- Do not force the student to process the incident until they are ready to do so (otherwise it may lead to escalation of the behavior).

Adapted from Hobbs[17]

How Can Student Efforts to Turn a Situation Around Be Encouraged?

In addition to determining how to engage a student in an activity, teachers need to find an acceptable way to reward the student. Figure 7.3 provides tips on how to reward student efforts for responding appropriately during a challenging interaction.

Always take time following an incident to process with the students and others who were involved. Incorporate what you learned into support strategies used to prevent problems from occurring. Our approach places the focus of intervention on prevention and teaching, not responding. Response strategies are necessary but are to be used as a band-aid for times when a situation requires more than prevention and teaching.

Reflection Question

- Using the student identified for the previous reflection questions, review the tips and select tips which may be useful with the student.

How Can You Respond When Students are Out of Control?

Behaviors that provoke strong emotions (e.g., embarrassment, anger, depression, fear) and/or represent a potential threat to the safety of the student or others are *intense* behaviors. Behaviors of this intensity are always difficult to respond to. Therefore, when the student's behavior is at a high level of *intensity*, the student, the student's family, and school staff need to develop a plan which will insure the safety and dignity of everyone involved.

In recent years we have been lead to believe that generic "restraint" training would enable us to manage a student's *intense* behaviors. Use of "restraint" generally requires a change in how educators typically react or respond to students; however, students experiencing "restraint" rarely describe the strategy as respectful or helpful. It may also be "re-traumatizing" for students with a history of physical/sexual abuse. Contrary to the goal of educators, use of "restraint" does not defuse situations but rather escalates incidents as relationships are severed and the student feels singled out, blamed, and not cared for. Also, for the simple reason that the training is generic, it does not meet the unique needs of the student or the other persons involved. Therefore, when a student's behavior is *intense*, how the student and other people in the environment respond takes individual planning.

Figure 7.3

TIPS FOR PROVIDING IMMEDIATE FEEDBACK AND REWARD FOR ANY EFFORT THE STUDENT MAKES TO TURN THE SITUATION AROUND

- Initiate giving and sharing rewards immediately — accept any level of effort made to participate.

- Acts of human kindness are not limited to verbal praise. Be creative. There are numerous ways of expressing your appreciation.

- Use humor to lighten the mood. Use the opportunity to show students how to be reassuring and positive with someone who is very challenging. Teach them to avoid the trap of only being nice to someone after they do what you want.

- Be a positive role model for your students. Demonstrate how caring about another human being and helping in a time of need is never a mistake.

- Overall, the bulk of your contact with the person should be rewarding not demanding.

- If at first the student rejects your attempt to show appreciation, try to do so in some other way (also reflect on how difficult it is at times to accept praise, especially if we are feeling lousy about ourselves).

- Consider stating a compliment as an "I message" which may be easier for the student to accept.

- Take the time to teach reciprocity. Create opportunities for students to do favors for you and other students.

Adapted from Hobbs[18]

As a first step in developing an individualized response plan for a student, team members should convey a desire to help while asking what they can do. It is essential to talk with the student when they are calm rather than expecting the student to think and process when distressed. If the student's individualized response plan requires others to touch the student, the use of physical touch or contact should only be done with the purpose of enabling the student to relax, calm down and remain safe when they are feeling or acting out of control. **This type of physical contact should never be used for compliance training or for punishment.** The student should be aware of how the physical contact will look and feel; and they should practice the procedure at times when they are calm and able to give feedback. These plans should only be implemented after they have been: approved by the parent, written, made part of the student's individual education plan, reviewed by a Human Rights Committee (if one exists at the school), and approved in writing and monitored by a professional (psychiatrist or licensed psychologist) with expertise in this area.

In summary, this chapter has described how teams select and teach replacement behavior and how to respond to difficult behavior. Our approach incorporates logical consequences which includes specific plans for how to respond when faced with a challenging teaching interaction. As we mentioned, these ideas may require hands-on inservice training to enable teachers to refine and change their ability to safely and positively guide a student through a difficult incident.

In Chapter 2 we included a diagram of Malcolm and Allison's Support plans. Completing a similar form for your student will summarize your selected strategies. The next chapter provides an overview on including students with challenging behavior in regular classrooms.

Chapter 8

Including Students with Challenging Behavior In Regular Class Activities, Monitoring Progress, and Planning Transitions

Including Students In Regular Class Activities

This section of the chapter describes a process for planning how students' needs can be met in regular class activities. Needed student supports, the student's response plan, selected replacement behaviors, and other relevant skills the student needs to learn must be integrated into the framework of regular class activities. This integration includes: 1) balancing what students need to be successful with what is expected based upon their grade level, the school's curriculum, and graduation requirements (e.g., all tenth graders are required to take U. S. History); 2) balancing students' desire to be treated like everyone else with the need to modify curriculum to match to their ability; and 3) balancing expectations for full inclusion with students' needs for activities outside of the regular classroom (e.g., individual counseling, job experiences, community service). We return briefly to Malcolm, Joseph and Allison to illustrate some of the issues teams face in supporting students to be successful in regular class activities.

- Malcolm was an excellent math student but was very disruptive in social studies. Some team members wanted him to take two math classes and to spend his free period tutoring peers in math. Others felt he needed to follow a typical schedule because he wanted to go to college. Still others recognized that Malcolm was on the verge of dropping out of school (or being expelled) due to his behavior. The team opted to temporarily suspend the curriculum requirements and allow Malcolm to focus on math so he could be successful, feel good about himself and remain in school.
- Joseph's teachers included him in all the typical classroom activities but they adapted the lessons to include diverse learning styles and to accept different learning objectives. It would have been easy to ask Joseph to use different materials geared to his specific learning objectives but his teachers recognized that having different materials was very stigmatizing and they honored his desire to be treated just like everyone else.

- Allison's teachers enabled her to participate in typical learning activities for the entire school day by creating opportunities for her to work in other classrooms with older and younger students. Before implementing the plan Allison was only engaged in activities 20% of the time and her teachers questioned the efficacy of asking her to increase her participation level to 80% overnight. Once Allison was provided with activities geared to her strengths and adapted to her learning style she was able to dramatically increase her level of participation.

We must keep in mind that some students are experiencing an intense amount of pain, anger or depression which may be due to such traumatic events as physical and psychological abuse or the death of a family member. Teams must be prepared to proceed slowly and anticipate and plan for set backs. Despite our optimistic attitude and our own personal need to move forward at a rapid pace, we cannot push someone through the healing process.

How Do We Plan to Meet Students' Needs Within Regular Class Activities?

Students with emotional and behavioral challenges should be assigned to the same classes and activities as other students of a similar chronological age. If students are not currently assigned to regular education classes, the first step is to assign them. Issues around class assignments may be resolved by considering the match between class content, teaching styles and peer diversity, and the student's strengths, needs and goals.

Once regular classes are identified the team needs to specifically determine: 1) what supports (prevention strategies) to provide during each regular education activity; 2) what expected skills (based upon the general education curriculum) and additional skills (replacement behavior, other relevant skills such as social/communication skills and IEP objectives) to teach during each activity; and 3) how to respond to the challenging behavior if it should occur during the activity. The process for developing a support plan for each regular class activity is relatively straightforward. It is a matter of incorporating the information already gathered and discussed into a plan around each specific activity.

The teacher responsible for each activity should describe the activity to the team. The description should include the materials generally used, how students are grouped for instruction and the what the teacher expects the class to gain from the activity. Once the team understands the activity, team members should discuss the activity in relation to the skills that the student needs to learn, how the student best learns, and the supports the student will require to be successful. The team can decide: a) that the student and her needed supports can be accommodated within the activity; b) that the activity will require modifications in order for the student to be involved; or c) that the student should not take part in this activity. If the team decides that the student's needs cannot be met though a particular activity, the team must identify an alternative activity. This could be a more appropriate regular class activity in another classroom or area of the school (e.g., library, gym) or an alternative activity outside of the regular classroom (e.g., a community activity, job placement). When this situation occurs, the team should avoid isolating the student and instead create or have the student join learning activities with other typical students.

When the team knows what supports and skills to target in each activity throughout the day, the team's focus shifts to making it happen. This is where the team approach strengthens the probability of being successful because the responsibility and support for what happens is shared.

How Can Progress Be Monitored?

When monitoring progress it is important to look at the whole student and assess how well the student is doing on behavior and academic issues as well as concerns in such areas as making friends, self-esteem, self-management. The team should also assess how well it is functioning as a team and supporting team members. The team should review the student's support plan at least once a month. Some questions teams should address when reviewing the support plan include:

- Have we been able to follow our plan?
- Are we listening to and meeting the student's needs?
- Are we listening to and meeting the needs of the classroom teachers?
- What positive changes have we seen in regard to:
    - Classroom Environment?
    - Peer Relationships?
    - Self-Esteem?
    - Self-Control?
    - Personal Philosophy?
    - Personal Teaching Style?
- What areas of the plan will we continue to use?
- What areas of the plan need to be changed?

There are many different methods for monitoring student progress. The methods chosen will depend on the specific outcomes chosen for the student. Some methods that teams have found useful include:

- Student self-evaluations of progress over time;
- Teacher and parent progress reports;

- Videotapes of learning activities to illustrate/document change over time;
- Team-developed questionnaires given to families, teachers and students to document perceptions of progress over time;
- Frequency counts of replacement behaviors and challenging behaviors over time; and
- Evaluation of the student's written products to document increased completion, accuracy and quality.

How Can Team Functioning Be Monitored?

In addition to evaluating teacher and student outcomes we also need to monitor how the team is functioning. Periodic check-ins insure that relationships between team members remain supportive and equitable. It is natural for team members to disagree and the team needs to be pro-active about resolving conflicts. When team members get their needs met, they are more likely to fulfill their team responsibilities and look forward to meeting again. Set aside time at least once a month for each team member to state how the teaming process is working, not working, and how the process could be different. We suggest using the checklists provided in the beginning of Chapter 3 to discuss and monitor how well the team is functioning. As team members develop trust in one another, consider generating unique ways to evaluate the teaming experience.

How Can Transitions Be Planned?

> *I walked into math class and none of my friends were there. I felt out of place. This is the third class I have where I don't know anybody. It's hard 'cause they whisper your name and talk about you. And it pisses me off when they say things behind my back. I think I'm going to hate school this year.*
>
> Malcolm, first day of school

Support plans don't change difficult behavior; relationships do. The trust shared with fellow students and teachers is the glue that holds successful educational experiences together. Teams need to anticipate and plan for challenges created by saying good-bye to this year's peers and teachers and fostering connections with new folks next year. For example, educators from Rapid City, South Dakota have formalized attachment and detachment rituals as a way of coping with children passing from foster home to foster home, school to school and community to community. The first day of school students are invited to carve their name onto a log placed in the lobby of the school. When a student is moving on their class gathers to light candles and share stories of praise about the student. Another strategy used to facilitate the development of new relationships is to add an autobiography to students' cumulative school records. Each year the autobiography is reworked as students write about their hobbies, relationships, work and interests.

Books have been written on how to plan transitions to next grade, next school, or adult living. We do not intend to summarize this body of work. Our comments briefly highlight transition planning from one grade to the next. Identify the student's next year's teachers early in the spring of the current year. Gradually add these key players to the planning team and provide opportunities for them to learn collaborative teaming. Current and new team members should review the student's support plan and revise the plan to meet the unique support needs of the upcoming year. Next year's teachers should observe the student and create opportunities for the student to try out next year's classes. It may be easier and less obvious if a few peers accompanied the student or if both classes did an activity together. Overall create opportunities for all concerned parties to familiarize themselves with each other and the teaming process. It is essential that teams keep the flow of support to the student, family and teachers by continuing the process.

Conclusions

Now that you have read through this manual from cover to cover, you may be questioning the feasibility of actually applying these suggestions. Based on our own personal experience, what we've learned is that this is not an easy process. Much of the work is trial and error and no two situations are alike. What works for Joseph, may not work for Malcolm. But the important point is that it *did* work and continues to work for Joseph, Malcolm, Allison, and so many like them.

What does appear to be a critical component to a successful process is the use of collaborative teaming. Working with a group of people tends to reduce the pressure and blame of one individual; increases the number of creative ideas that are generated; provides different perspectives on the situation across varying environments; and allows people to support each other through difficult circumstances. Meeting on a regular basis enables staff to do the necessary planning for students and places the emphasis on pro-active instead of reactive interventions. These teams tend to work best when everyone feels that they are an equal member, with an equal voice in decision-making. As expressed by Alicia (Joseph's mother) the teamwork truly began when the school staff created a space for her and Joseph to be equal members of the team.

Team members tell us that in addition to the support they received, it was imperative to begin the process by gaining an understanding of all the factors that may be contributing to the student's behavior. This preliminary information is obtained through listening to the different perspectives of those who know the student best and taking the time to observe the student in a variety of situations. As mentioned, this is accomplished by having a complete history of the student's life circumstances and identifying the communication of her behavior. So often, elaborate plans are doomed to failure because they do not meet the student's basic needs and are unrelated to the purpose of their challenging behavior.

Finally, another resounding theme expressed by teams is that it is very difficult to stay focused on a student's strengths during stressful situations. However, despite the challenging nature of a student's behavior and the fact that she can be so distancing at times, caregivers tell us that continuing to focus on the student's strengths has proved to be the cornerstone of an effective plan and a rewarding relationship.

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